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COMMUNITY COLLEGE CHOICE AND CAMPUS EXPERIENCES OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED STUDENTS

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ALICIA M. MCCULLAR
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COMMUNITY COLLEGE CHOICE

AND CAMPUS EXPERIENCES OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED STUDENTS

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Siduri Haslerig, Chair

Dr. Michelle Eodice

Dr. Natalie Youngbull

Dr. Kirsten Hextrum

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Abstract

The design of higher education is a stratified system to funnel the most academically prepared students from the highest earning households to the most selective higher education institutions. Conversely, students who are the least academically prepared and in the lowest socio-economic quintiles are funneled to the lowest-tiered institution in alarming proportions. The undermatch hypothesis concludes that a student who qualifies for admissions to a research university or a regionally accredited university will have a higher propensity to graduate if they are appropriately matched (Bowen et al., 2009).

As Bourdieu (1977) argues, the education system is the structure that ensures the continuous oppression of the lower quintiles of social class, supports the power relations, and favors the dominant culture. The messiness of choice is complex when considering merits, college options, degree choices, location, housing, cost, family expectations, and an array of other factors that play a part in the final outcome of where to begin college. The study will highlight the process as the highly qualified student approaches college choice and decides to begin at an open access community college. The longitudinal research will then explore the experience of highly qualified students at a community college, adding to the literature.

Key words: Community College, college choice, undermatch, college match, stratified system of higher education, highly qualified student,

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The stratification of higher education is the foundation that aligns college and university admission policies with tuition prices (Bastedo & Gumport, 2003). As high school students approach college choice, the process includes a multitude of factors influencing next steps in college going decisions. The method in which a student approaches college choice is influenced by the social constructs of familial habitus, race, class, peers, cultural capital, and access to education in formative years. The project began as a study to consider how a highly qualified student approaches college choice that steers them toward beginning at a community college. When the alignment between merits earned in high school and choice do not match, the selectivity of the college or university the student qualifies for is considered an undermatch. The study aimed to go a step further in analysis with a longitudinal approach. In the process, the realization of reproduction theories as the students approached community college choice was pronounced. A notable shortcoming of the study is that racialized stories were not explored nor analyzed.

The review of the influences leading to college choice substantiated the social structure of capitalism and the design of education (Robbins, 1993). The pluralistic view of capitalism ascribes college choice to individualized decisions, made of free will. However, the pluralistic view does not account for transactions of power from the dominant class and power holders that potentially transmit ideologies through encounters in school and are reinforced by familial habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). In contrast, reproduction theories challenge the structure of American schooling and the influence of capitalism in the reproduction of ideologies as a student approaches college choice decisions (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

College choice is viewed as being deeply complex and personal. McDonough (1997) described college choice as "a complex interactive process involving individual aspiration and institutional admission, students connect with colleges" (p. 1). In recent years, the process of college choice has been evaluated. Bowen et al. (2009) coined the term "undermatch" to describe the occurrence when a high school student's college choice does not align with the admission standards of the institution the student qualifies to attend. Smith et al. (2012) found that the misalignment of high school performance and college admissions policy constitutes an undermatch. According to undermatch literature provided by Bowen et al. (2009), the students' college choice should closely align with the institution's admission policies and the students' academic performance in high school. Smith et al. (2012) that if a student selects a college that is considered out of alignment as demonstrated by qualifying exams (ACT and SAT) and grade point average (GPA), undermatch data suggests the student will experience an educational disservice (Bowen et al., 2009). In this study, there are ideological tensions between the prescriptive, but ostensibly meritocratic, nature of college match proponents and the somewhat deterministic cultural influences of familial habitus that lead to selecting where to start college. College match proponents promote that the most qualified students should attend the most academically selective institutions, and this will produce the greatest propensity toward social mobility. In contrast, reproduction theories argue that students are funneled into certain institutions not based on merit, but instead based on reproducing their existing socio-economic class (SEC). The concepts of college match are deterministic as the higher education of choice is aligned based on meritocracy. When a student from a lower-class household attends a more selective university, the misalignment of SEC to selectivity of university can be seen as a staged resistance to the reproduction of the stratified system of higher education. The human aspect of

college choice is complex as the student applies the interpellation of reproduction that constitutes the beliefs about where the student belongs. Furthermore, this guides the student toward an occupation that aids in reproducing family status as the student is linked to the higher education institution that keeps the societal forces in alignment.

The United States expanded education access following WWII. This is when education was beginning to be viewed as a human right (Kosutic, 2017). In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated, "Technical and professional education shall be made generally available, and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit" (Baranovic, 2015, p. 23). Unfortunately, the structure, access, and cultural capital needed to negotiate the stratified system is layered with complexities and barriers exasperated by reproduction theories. Reproduction theories suggest that social inequalities are not only prevalent in the labor market, but also have an astounding impact on one's ability to navigate the structure and create true social mobility (Willis, 1981). Social and cultural reproduction is the legitimization and maintenance of the vertical order for the benefit of the dominant classes as a continuation of reproducing social inequalities (Nash, 1990). Winston and Zimmerman (2004) acknowledge that the underpinnings of undermatch philosophy will naturally funnel the students lacking cultural capital to open-access community colleges. Likewise, the stratification of higher education, the familial reproduction, and the deterministic design of college match create concerns that attending a community college may stifle opportunity for social mobility for the highly qualified student. The National Association of College Admission Counseling (2015) states that a student's high school performance is the most vital indicator to align college admission decisions. The following research study examined the influences and processes involved in the highly qualified students' decision to attend an open-access, urban community

college, as well as the students' lived experiences that transpired during the first year.

Problem Statement

Public higher education is designed to funnel the most academically prepared students and the most financially stable students to successfully enroll in top tier universities (Triventi, 2013). In comparison, Trow (1984) notes that the students who are the least academically prepared and in the lowest socio-economic quintiles are directed to the lowest-tiered institutions in the vertical order, hence the community college. The undermatch hypothesis concludes that a student who qualifies for admission to a research university or a regionally accredited university will have a higher propensity to graduate if they are appropriately matched (Bowen et al., 2009).

As Bourdieu (1977) argues, the education system is the structure that ensures the continuous oppression of the lower quintiles of social class, supports the power relations, and favors the dominant culture. "The educational system is, therefore, an important factor in maintaining social inequalities, as students from educationally, financially, and socially privileged families achieve higher educational and professional success and thereby reproduce patterns of social stratification and retain their positions of power" (Kosutic, 2017, p. 153). Hence, the fight for social mobility, as well as the intent of undermatched advocates, is presented as a pure endeavor to resist the funneling of the poorest students to the least funded higher education institutions. The higher education system is designed to uphold stratified barriers of entry and access to maintain the prestige, selectivity, and quality the university values.

Community colleges are open access. Does the community college serve as a catalyst to maintain reproduction theories by funneling the students based on social economic class (SEC), race, and ethnicity, regardless of merit? This qualitative research is exploring how community college choice was approached by the highly qualified student, including influences in choice.

The narratives tell the story of community college choice and campus involvement. The data was analyzed from the lens of college choice, campus involvement, and finally to decipher evidence of the accumulation of increased social and cultural capital when attending the lowest-tiered institution. The problem remains: Is the community college an acceptable choice for the highly qualified student? Will the highly qualified student have a campus experience at an urban community college that is notable?

Research Questions

The interconnected research questions follow: Why do highly qualified students choose to attend a community college? How do highly qualified college bound students make meaning of the transition to college? How do highly qualified students view the overall first-year experience at a community college? How do the participants' college experiences relate to being undermatched? The research questions evaluate the college choice process for the individual student. This study was designed to examine the lived experiences of the highly qualified students at the community college and how each student made decisions, navigated the campus, and fared during the first year of college (Xu et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the qualitative study is to explore the lived experiences of undermatched students who begin their higher education trek at a community college. The study will include narratives exploring the students' journey toward college choice, consider the complexities and factors that led up to their decision, explore student development theory and the role in college transition, and hear the story of student involvement and how that relates to overall perceptions and ideations of attending a community college. The study is particularly relevant today.

As highly qualified students approach college choice, school administrators may push the

undermatch agenda to attend a higher-tiered institution. Current professional development conferences and the College Board are producing a plethora of information that relates to undermatch. The influence of this concern about the consequences of undermatching is distributed to highly qualified students, potentially increasing their anxiety and ambivalence regarding college choice (Leonardo, 2010; McDonough, 1997). The messiness of choice is complex when considering merits, college options, degree choices, location, housing, cost, family expectations, and an array of other factors that play a part in the final outcome of where to begin college. This research will explore the experience of highly qualified students at a community college, adding to community college literature that is currently absent of narratives from academically equipped students and their campus experiences.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

At the forefront of undermatch is the concern that choosing to attend a community college would be disadvantageous to the highly qualified student (Healey et al., 2014). The literature review will examine the history of the community college and its initial purpose in the higher education system and how that purpose has shifted over the years. The literature will demonstrate how reproduction theories connect to the stratified systems of higher education, and how that directly impacts labor markets, and college choice. The literature will acknowledge the systemic barriers to college choice, attendance, and graduation rates for underrepresented college student as they face issues of "cooling-out effect" and "transfer shock" (Clark, 1960; Ishitani & McKintrick, 2010). The literature review will explore the design of the vertical order and societal ramifications of higher education structure, the bottom-tiered community colleges, and the addition to the system with the community colleges' expanded mission to transform into community college baccalaureate-granting institutions.

History of the Community College

The history of higher education begins with the story of white, wealthy males born into a world of access and privilege. The ability to study, think, and excel in any given field was a rite of passage (Vaughan, 2006). In 1862, the landscape of higher education began transitioning toward a broader scope of higher education access. The Morrill Act of 1862 broadened the reach of higher education with the creation of land grant institutions, allowing more access for individuals who were not accustomed to being included in the higher education scene. From the Morrill Act of 1862, the concept of the "people's colleges" began to expand the mindset from liberal education to practical education (Vaughan, 2006). As access increased, universities felt a

need to distinguish themselves as research institutions. As a result, the research institutions wanted to decrease the offerings of basic coursework to remain advanced in their offerings to the constituency they served (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

The father of the community college, William Harper, replicated the German University or pure-form university offering the first two years of college at separate institutions (Cohen and Brawer, 1977). At the turn of the century, university presidents began to adopt the idea that the first two years of college could be completed in high schools or at other institutions outside of the university. The first two years of college include what is referred to as basic coursework required of all students, typically consisting of courses in English, history, speech, math, and science (Vaughan, 2006). These areas are not regarded as specialized subjects, but simply as a preparatory foundation for honing critical thinking skills as the student moves toward a specialized field associated with the intended major. Research institutions wanted to focus on developing the intellectual elite to give them a space to think and thrive. As a result, the junior college was birthed out of the desire to no longer bother with the basic coursework and focus on fostering the future professionals and intellectual players in the world of business and medicine (Vaughn, 2006). Two models of junior colleges derived from this movement. Harper divided the University of Chicago into two divisions, the Junior College and the Senior College. The Junior College encompassed basic coursework, or the first two years of study. As a result, the associate degree was established to award the students a milestone for completing the first two years of coursework (Frederick, 1990). Harper also thought that for some students, reaching this milestone would be enough. The root of this belief was elitist in nature, with the intent to limit university access to the most academically gifted students. These students would be allowed and encouraged to continue in the pursuit of higher education (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Harper then

commissioned universities that were considered academically weaker and lacked rigor to drop the last two years of coursework and become junior colleges. As you can see, this was a defining moment to ensure that social class exclusion could be justified on the basis of merit as higher education elitism was sustained through the separation of types of institutions. Bourdieu (1977) describes:

> By making social hierarchies and the reproduction of these hierarchies appear to be based upon the hierarchy of "gifts," merits, or skills established and ratified by its sanctions, or, in a word, by converting social hierarchies into academic hierarchies, the educational system fulfills a function of legitimation which is more and more necessary to the perpetuation of the "social order'' as the evolution of the power relationship between classes tends more completely to exclude the imposition of a hierarchy based upon the crude and ruthless affirmation of the power relationship. (p. 60)

The second model allowed the university to be free from the responsibility of the first year of coursework, intertwining the basic courses into the high school curriculum through college preparatory high schools. Likewise, the university would allow the students to enter with advanced standing into what was known as the senior college (Brint & Karabel, 1989). The idea blossomed, and within a few short years, enrollment trends were substantial.

In 1944, the GI bill increased the demand for community college as an affordable option and increased access for a more diversified population (Frederick, 1990). With the influx of military vets, the viability of junior colleges increased, along with the federal funding supporting education creating breakthroughs in social and economic barriers (Vaughan, 2006). During the 1960s social movements and political climate, the open-door policy of the community college allowed a shift in the landscape of higher education. President Truman adopted the ideology that

higher education was no longer a privilege, but a right. The demographics of the two-year college shifted the landscape of higher education, now including "new students" who represented the lowest economic quintile of high school graduates; students from lower socioeconomic upbringings; and women. A vast increase in the number of college students from more diverse backgrounds led to simultaneous expansion of the number of community colleges. Bogue (1950) was an instrumental leader; the junior college mission statements were more expansive and included the community needs for educating the workforce. Fulfilling the need for the workforce was highly correlated to the community in which the college was situated, and meeting specific demands in these particular labor markets. As a result, a shift from "junior college" occurred and the term "community college" was coined (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

In the last decade, emphasis on higher education accessibility was at the forefront of political movements and debates. In 2012, President Obama created a complete college initiative. He was dedicated to increasing financial aid for low-income students, revamping the student loan system, and publicly stating that everyone needed some form of education. President Obama included community colleges in the initiatives and messaging (Lederman & Fain, 2017). Out of devotion for giving all students the opportunity of education, President Obama essentially endorsed the mission and worth of the community college. Critics thought Obama was cheapening education by supporting the idea that community colleges were an appropriate form of higher education to advance society (Lederman & Fain, 2017). According to the U.S. Department of Education in the United States, there are 1,047 public community colleges and 415 private community colleges. The Community College Research Center reports that 9 million undergraduates are enrolled in community colleges. Furthermore, the data states that 49% of all college students had enrolled in a community college in the last ten years, which includes dual

enrollment in high school. The Education Longitudinal Study, 2002-2006, reports that 44% of low-income students, defined by household income below $25,000, attended a community college as their first college, while only 15% of high-income students did so. First-generation students account for 38% of the students who choose community college as their first institution. "In fall 2014, 56% of Hispanic undergraduates were enrolled at community colleges, while 44% of Black students, and 39% of whites" (College Board, Trends in Community College, 2016). The struggle for funding and recognition of worth creates a dichotomy as students attempt to decide if a community college will fit into their individual college choice.

Community colleges are situated at the lowest tier of the hierarchical system of higher education. The low position in the stratification plays into social class, aptitudes, and support for funding. Zwerling (1976) points out that the system design allows the community college student to "hover just inside the edge of impossibility" to break through class barriers (p.14). Universities place high regard on the prestige, reputation, and selectivity of their institutions, not to mention the fame and notoriety of their graduates, pairing the university to the potential footprint of ingenuity and impact to society (Brint, & Karabel,1989). To uphold the prestige of the university, it is critical for the power structure to maintain the stance that an open-access community college is simply a place for the lower class, lower ability student, to have a chance at college. This glass tower vantage point is even transferred to the community college faculty and administration. Community college advocates ascribe to the belief that the community college provides an affordable opportunity for students, including but not limited to the less-prepared college goer, acting as an equalizer in higher education by giving affordable options for the lower social class college students. However, Zwerling (1976) argues that the community college does the opposite. Instead of blunting the pyramid of the American social and economic

structure, the community college plays an essential role in maintaining the stratified system. The establishment is another barrier between the poor and disfranchised and the decent and respectable as attempts toward social mobility are hindered and advancement in social class is stifled (Lederman & Fain, 2017). The stratified structure has been in the business of facilitating and certifying inequality, whereas all along it has been proclaiming upward mobility for the intellectual. The suppressive nature of the system is heightened by the contrast between the stratification of higher education, the deficits in community college funding, and being positioned as the least selective higher education options.

Stratification of Higher Education

The research depicting the stratification of higher education conveys a stable and vertical order (Bloch & Mitterle, 2017). Broken into two parts, the stratified divide encompasses policies and procedures established by the state and the judgments of the academic stakeholders regarding each institution (Trow, 1984). As a result, this stable and vertical order may create boundaries to minimize opportunity for all students. According to Kelly et al. (2016):

> An efficient university system will place the best students in research universities, honors programs, and elite liberal arts colleges. The system perpetuates the 'good' students should attend the 'good' colleges and the 'average' students should attend the 'average' schools as evidenced by admission requirements (p. 76).

Lower-performing students will be admitted to open-access community colleges (Bastedo, 2009). When it is all calculated, one might surmise that the higher education system creates a redistribution of the funding from the poor to the rich (Zwerling, 1976). A closer examination of how the state distributes taxpayer dollars to each institution reinforces and sustains the systematic economic hierarchy (Zwerling, 1976). The richer you are, the more likely you are to

attend a more elite university. The amount of cultural capital you have also increases your position in maintaining order. Furthermore, the review of literature and educational structures will include a breakdown of the Oklahoma higher education system, review research relating to the stratification of higher education as it relates to price and selectivity, and will finally discuss the impact on labor markets and the social ramifications of all the above (Hearn, 1991; Karen, 2002; Winston & Zimmerman, 2004).

Oklahoma Higher Education System

In 1941, the Oklahoma state legislature created the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE, 2020). The 1941 coordinating board stated, "Oklahoma now has the greatest opportunity in its history to chart an intelligent course for higher education on a statewide basis, and to assume a greater leadership throughout the nation than has ever before been possible" (OSRHE, 2017, p. 1). The Oklahoma higher education system encompasses 25 colleges and universities: Two research universities, 10 regional universities, one public liberal arts university, and 12 community colleges. The admission policies, cost of attendance, and state funding differ amongst each institution, illustrating a vertical stratified system.

The state admission policies are created by and regulated by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education.

Figure 1: Admission Standards (OSRHE 2020-2021 Resource Book (p.7)

	OPTION 1 Minimum ACT/SAT	OPTION 2 Minimum GPA and Class Rank	OPTION 3
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY[1]	24 ACT/1160 SAT[2]	3.0 GPA AND top 33%	3.0 GPA AND 21 ACT/1060 SAT[2]
	OPTION 4 ACT/SAT or High School GPA Plus Cognitive Factors and Non-Cognitive Factors		
	• Students who score between current OSU admission standards and the minimum State Regents' standards (22 ACT or 1020 SAT[2] or unweighted high school core curriculum GPA of at least 3.0) • Cognitive Factors (60%) • Non-Cognitive Factors (40%)		
UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA	Applications are evaluated using a holistic admissions process that takes into account academic success as well as several other factors.[3] You should fulfill the following requirements: take required high school classes and graduate from an accredited high school or have a GED and take the ACT exam.		
UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND ARTS OF OKLAHOMA	24 ACT/1160 SAT[2] AND 3.0 GPA or top 50% class rank	3.0 GPA AND top 25% class rank	22 ACT/1100 SAT[2] AND 3.0 GPA
REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES	20 ACT/1030 SAT[2]	2.7 GPA AND top 50% class rank	2.7 GPA
COMMUNITY COLLEGES	No minimum required		

Since 2012, as a result of reduced state funding for higher education in Oklahoma, the two flagship institutions have included a holistic policy to admission in order to increase enrollment. For example, the University of Oklahoma website (2021) indicates the holistic additions to the admission policy:

> The University's goal is to build a first-year class of highly qualified, intellectually curious and actively involved students who have demonstrated high levels of integrity, maturity and commitment to serving their communities. OU's Admission Committee appreciates the importance of considering other factors beyond academic achievement to discern an applicant's overall abilities. Therefore, a more comprehensive review of a student's entire application file will occur after the initial academic review.

Oklahoma State University (2021) has adopted a similar holistic approach to admissions. The 10 regional institutions do not have a holistic statement on their respective websites; however, students can be admitted on a provisional basis. Provisional admission allows the student to begin at the university while being placed on probation, giving the student an opportunity to

demonstrate academic proficiency. The 12 community colleges are open-access. Open-access colleges operate under an admission policy that any student, regardless of high school performance or test scores, will be granted acceptance into the institution.

Universities with selective admission standards factor in academic accomplishments as evidenced by grades, rigorous course work, test scores, and extracurricular activities to determine college admission (Kingston & Lewis, 1990). The students who are from affluent homes possess greater economic capital, which increases the likelihood of admission. Bastedo et al., (2009) recognize this advantage:

> Students from affluent households may possess an advantage in admissions processes not only because of the educational attainment of their parents, but also because they have access to important resources in the competition for prestigious institutions such as better primary/secondary schools and tutoring and extra-curricular (p. 12).

The critics of the state hierarchal systems find that college placement alignment for each individual student reinforces a social stratification between academic preparedness and socioeconomic status. Bastedo et al. (2009) notes "students are matched to institutions consonant with their academic preparation" (p. 7). As a result, "cascading" occurs. Cascading is the phenomenon when "the pattern of choices made by students who are refused entry to very highly selective institutions who are then admitted to somewhat less selective institutions" (Trow, 1999, p. 66). The students who are denied access to the institution cascade. The student, once denied the opportunity to the selective institution, may lose sight of goals and pick a college or university that is significantly below what would be deemed as an appropriate match (Trow, 1984).

The concern is not only the academic barrier this scenario creates, but also the recurrence of the students with the lowest socio-economic status being denied access more frequently and disproportionately than students with financial capital (Bastedo et al., 2009). Likewise, theorists predict that the institutional stratification increases selective colleges and universities' ability to attract and enroll students with the highest socioeconomic status (Blau, 1994; Bourdieu, 1988, Frank & Cook, 2010; Trow, 1984). When comparing academic preparedness, Hearn (1991) reported that minority students and students with low socio-economic status (SES) attended less selective institutions even when ability was equal. Bastedo et al. (2009) notes that scholars raise the question, does the trajectory potential for students become limited due to the stratified higher education system? The problem is not limited to academic preparedness of students and meeting admission requirements, but also the ability to afford education and taking time away from work commitments to go to college full time (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011). When access is limited, unequal opportunities and inequity are pronounced in the stratification of higher education.

The cost of attendance is also vertically stratified. Bailey and Dynarski (2011) recognize "the gaps in college enrollment between the top and bottom of the family income distribution is staggering; while 80 percent of the students from the top income quartile enroll in college, just 30 percent from the bottom quartile do so" (as cited in Kelly et al., 2016, p. 188).

Figure 2: Cost by Institution (OSRHE, Resource book, 2020, p.11)

2020-21 Estimated Student Costs for Resident Students at Oklahoma Public Colleges and Universities

	Research Universities	Regional Universities	Community Colleges	Technical Branches
Tuition	$5,072	$5,665	$3,386	$4,203
Mandatory Fees	$3,968	$1,605	$1,212	$991
Average Academic Service Fees	$3,069	$636	$390	$623
Room and Board*	$9,760	$6,590	$6,164	$5,896
Books and Supplies	$970	$1,148	$1,306	$1,320
Total	**$22,839**	**$15,645**	**$12,458**	**$13,032**

The OSRHE must approve each public college and university tuition and fee schedule. Stratified higher education systems with cost barriers sustain the prominent gap between students in the lower SES income brackets (Marginson, 2016). Oklahoma higher education institutions receive state funding determined by OSRHE. The flagship universities receive the largest portion of the funding and community colleges receive the least amount of funding from the state per institution. The distribution patterns are noted on chart below.

Figure 3: Chart of State Allocations by Institution (OSRHE, 2020, p. 15)[1]:

[1] Total funding spreadsheet provided and approved for study purposes by personal communication with Associate Vice Chancellor for Communications Angela Caddell, Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2021.

OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
TOTAL EDUCATIONAL & GENERAL - PART I BUDGET
COMPARISON OF FY2018 TO FY2019

TOTAL BUDGETED EXPENDITURES				
Institution	**FY2018**	**FY2019**	**Dollar Chg**	**% Chg**
OU	522,346,650	548,518,876	26,172,226	5.0%
OUHSC	179,534,143	174,931,537	(4,602,606)	(2.6%)
OULAW	22,256,826	24,700,847	2,444,021	11.0%
OU Tulsa	14,354,774	14,522,120	167,346	1.2%
OSU	449,634,378	464,720,890	15,086,512	3.4%
AG EXP	21,967,253	21,818,164	(149,089)	(0.7%)
COOP EXT	31,498,417	32,088,005	589,588	1.9%
OSU-CVHS	30,692,471	31,986,474	1,294,003	4.2%
OSU-CHS	92,993,096	79,432,352	(13,560,744)	(14.6%)
OSU TB OKC	24,501,582	26,258,783	1,757,201	7.2%
OSU IT OKM	29,365,072	28,146,255	(1,218,817)	(4.2%)
OSU TULSA	19,602,182	19,386,798	(215,384)	(1.1%)
UCO	186,237,097	186,814,861	577,764	0.3%
ECU	41,675,635	40,765,382	(910,253)	(2.2%)
NSU	84,297,000	85,797,000	1,500,000	1.8%
NWOSU	25,887,896	26,571,067	683,171	2.6%
SEOSU	44,491,452	46,614,068	2,122,616	4.8%
SWOSU	58,091,052	59,339,691	1,248,639	2.1%
CU	45,982,568	46,191,037	208,469	0.5%
LU	31,175,274	31,791,410	616,136	2.0%
OPSU	16,179,628	16,581,732	402,104	2.5%
RSU	32,830,669	33,605,230	774,561	2.4%
USAO	11,815,096	12,268,491	453,395	3.8%
CASC	11,489,145	11,882,288	393,143	3.4%
CSC	11,535,611	12,303,695	768,084	6.7%
EOSC	10,291,398	10,500,278	208,880	2.0%
MSC	14,941,039	14,366,901	(574,138)	(3.8%)
NEOAMC	16,165,257	16,388,477	223,220	1.4%
NOC	25,809,753	27,292,117	1,482,364	5.7%
OCCC	63,290,336	63,965,968	675,632	1.1%
RCC	11,469,831	12,120,403	650,572	5.7%
ROSE	36,726,721	37,534,682	807,961	2.2%
SSC	10,678,780	10,930,720	251,940	2.4%
TCC	110,749,702	117,379,940	6,630,238	6.0%
WOSC	10,007,018	10,016,793	9,775	0.1%
TOTAL	2,350,564,801	2,397,533,333	46,968,532	2.0%

Research institutions are funded at a substantially higher rate than regional universities and community colleges. The allocation of funds aligns with the selectivity of the institution.

Trow (1984) termed this disproportionate funding model as the "Matthew Effect," where the advantaged institutions receive a substantial proportion of the resources. "Whereas non-elite institutions have generally raised tuition only to the extent necessary to offset declines in public funding, flagship institutions have used tuition to increase spending per student" (Bastedo et al, 2009, p. 6). The Hidden Agenda authored by Orr (2001) states that adopting the Bourdiean concepts of social reproduction points out that the appropriation of funding is another means by the people in power to secure their place in the vertical order and keep the system stable. "Between 2015 and 2020, higher education funding from states rose by on average 18.8% which represents $15.3 billion total. In Oklahoma, funding fell 18.6% or $195 million" (Korth, 2020, p. 1). Community College Journal (2015) addresses the reduced funding, specifically the reduction of funding on communities, and tight correlation between providing education funding and the sustainability of the communities' work force.

Price and Selectivity

As funding becomes scarce due to the state's waning financial support and commitment to higher education, a decrease in enrollment and tuition increases will occur at regional universities and community colleges, but only as a means to meet budget demands. As the state legislature decreases funding for higher education, enrollment at community colleges increases (Richardson et al., 1998). The correlation between the price and selectivity amongst the institution types is mirrored by the students who are able to attend.

Using data from Maryland, 2005, findings show an increased gap of participation by African-American students in public four-year non-Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) due to the lack of support of state appropriations coupled with higher tuition increases (Bastedo et al, 2009). Historically, state and local governments have kept the cost of higher

education in check; the investment in the last 20 years has decreased, transferring more of the responsibility to students and families (Mettler, 2014). Therefore, cost does play a role in a student's choice among a flagship research university, a regional university, and a community college. Public higher education is a government entity designed to operate in an efficient and orderly manner to maximize state dollar allocations to each respective higher education institution. The construction of such systems is to increase efficiency and improve fit between students and college choice (Clark, 1987).

McDonough (1997) demonstrated "the most stubborn barriers to parity in entrance to college, however, are in social class background rather than race, ethnicity, or gender" (p. 4). The financial consideration to attend college filters students to community college at alarming rates. Cost is reported as the top reason students attend a community college. The concern is that there is a barrier of opportunity for lower SES in consideration to graduation rates. Students who first attend a community college rather than a four-year university are 13 percent less likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree (Long & Kurlaendar, 2009). Trends show that individuals from households with low SES have a lower propensity to invest in education and skills, further exacerbating the inequity experienced by limited-resource students. The struggle with educational expenses results in students having a lower prospect of turning a degree into a career (Marginson, 2016).

Shavit et al., (2007) research compounds the problem of the stratification of higher education, as affluent families dominate the system to their advantage. Marginson (2016) found "families with financial, social, cultural, or political capitals bring those capitals to bear on education and continue to do so in the transition to work and beyond" (p. 422). Oxfam (2014) refers to it as "opportunity hoarding" as privileged groups "take control of valuable resources

and assets for their benefit, such as access to quality education" (p. 20). The vertical order reinforces the financial barriers for limited-resource families and reinforces the institutional hierarchy. The upper-middle class families, through resources and capital, put forth great effort in attempts to receive the highest possible position in the system, while the limited-resource students "are less likely to nurture ambitions and more likely to be deterred by cost" (Marginson, 2016, p. 421). Families with social advantages compete for scarce resources and pathways that allow for the greatest advantage in a hierarchical structure of value and opportunity (Triventi, 2013; Lucas, 2009). Likewise, families with the most resources strategically monopolize the system to help their students receive advantages. When college choice is determined by the cost of college, it is noted by Goldthorpe (2007) a social reproduction that is "doubly guaranteed by transmission of family's capital to children and by passive role of an educational system that does not enable social transformation" (p. 11).

Reproduction Theories of Education

Reproduction theories create a messy ambivalence (Leonardo, 2010). The crux of the reproduction theories is how social relationships such as class, race, and gender are maintained over time (Bourdieu, 1977). There is no formula to adequately stage a disruption to the reproduction that is occurring because it is stable and reinforced by structures. A major institutional factor in reproduction is the public school (Lakomski, 1984). American society views schools as a neutral vessel which allow equal chances for every student to be educated and establish hopes and dreams for the future. However, the neutrality is questioned as the capital a student possesses paired with the linguistic abilities is assigned value as giftedness and merit (Bernstein, 1977). As the student develops, they begin to derive their worth and beliefs from the interactions that occur in the structure inside the school.

Two forms of resistance can transpire. If the student is funneled toward a career technology center to earn a trade or workforce straight from high school and the student decides to go to college this can be a disruption to the schools attempt of reproduction. Community colleges are a major player in the landscape of college attendees. Community colleges enroll "higher proportions of Black, Latinx and Native American students, and the vast majority (81 percent by last estimate) of entering students are seeking a bachelor's degree or above" (Fink 2021, p.1). Another form of resistance is the ethnically diverse student is from a household of a lower SEC and select a higher tiered university a resistance to keeping the reproduction of familial habitus is disrupted. However, attempts to disrupt reproduction through resistance appear to be futile with the depth of foundation sustained by cemented pillars holding social class, race, and gender in their respective space (Bernstein, 1977). The one institution that is consistent between each theory is the power of the public school. Schools are the consistent instrument that holds the societal power, influence, and access to the people to sustain and reproduce inequality promoting class domination practices and privilege (Lakomski, 1984). The credentials earned in school can be traded for economic market value and this is a central tendency of why Marxist focused on schools. The tension between reproduction and resistance is the conflict that exists between the following theories. The belief of resisting the confines of the system regardless of race, gender, or class allowing an individual to act as an human agent capable of breaking free of the crux of class barriers is in conflict with the capitalist design to reproduce the outcomes of a capitalist structure. There lies the messiness of education choice, education achievement, and sustaining the vertical order funneling the individual into the desired higher education institution achieving the desired societal outcomes (Leonardo, 2010).

In consideration of the means in which reproduction occurs, it is important to note three

forms of capital exist which are not mutually exclusive. Economic capital is the process of converting capital into money and institutionalized into property (Willis, 1981). The economic platform strives to keep it simple and not add in the other components of influence or culture that allows the economic principles to be sustained. Cultural capital is converted into economic capital by means of institutionalization into the forms of education qualifications (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Cultural capital is the focus of the study, as we witness sectors of the populations included or excluded based on meritocracy and or social class to reproduce the capitalist system (Bourdieu, 1977). Social capital converted by connections can result in conversions of economic capital in the forms of title and rank (Richardson et al., 1998). Social capital is increased due to family, community, privilege, or occupying spaces that provide opportunities to make connections that can lead to upward trajectory and to increase social mobility.

Capital and Economic Reproduction

Cultural capital is the disposition, skills, and characteristics a person possess that embodies social class and privilege as granted by the society in which they reside. Capitalism is the production of commodities within the constraints of private ownership as means to produce (Willis, 1981). The root of capitalism is to maximize profit within the context of self-interest to inflate and or increase economical gains resulting in more money, property, or increased labor force to produce more commodities (Richardson et al., 1998). The commodities are exchanged based on supply and demand in the form of labor and production. The people that do not own property, a business, or cultural capital must exchange labor for capital. Therefore, the property holders or owners possess the power to dictate working conditions, place demands or expectations on workers, and decide the rate in which the workers are compensated (Marx &

Engles, 1970). In order to sustain the need for labor the owner must ensure the continuous cycle of production in order to meet demands, adapt to uphold relevancy, and possess workers to continually produce for the owners (Willis, 1981). The owners desire is to set wages at the lowest possible rate to increase profit and wealth for the owners. Capitalist development was progressive: it led to an 'increase in the productive forces of social labour' (Lane, 2021, p.459). The means to continually produce is to immerse the practices and ideologies in the structures that have access to the largest audience of future workers, the schools.

The schools were configured to aid in capitalist reproduction. Paz (2016) defines tenets of the school system to play the role in this reproduction. The schools act as a "modern capitalist society." The truth is schools are a product of history with fixed values on skills, behaviors, and practices that are linked to cultural class (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The school hides behind a curtain of "equal opportunity". Paz (2016) notes "equal opportunity" in a capitalist system is a "fallacy". The socializing and valuing of the dominant class is the socialization process that occurs through teaching. The end product is producing the laborers for the owners to uplift capitalism (Willis, 1981). The balance between the tension is not only producing the skilled workers for the owners, but also modeling submission to the dominant class as the school reproduced capitalist outcomes. This is an important part of the historical explanation for the formation of public schools. Public education is part of a complex relationship between the interests of and resistance from the capitalist class (Lakomski, 1984). Much of school formation occurred in a struggle between the capitalists and a working-class movement demanding free and expansive public education. Part of public education is rooted in the need to form a work force and to satisfy social demands made by the working class. No former mode of production posed the need to create a workforce that could comply with requirements of daily timeliness,

repetition, and attention. Education and schooling play an important role in developing these "skills."

The argument remains that schools are agencies, and they perpetuate the dominant class by assigning value to cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The idea is the schools must continually reproduce the same outcomes to sustain capitalism. In fact, "radical educators have argued the main function of schools are the reproduction of the dominant ideology, its forms of knowledge, and the distribution of skills needed to reproduce social division of labor" (Giroux, 1983, p. 257). Marx assigned the roles as "workers" and "owners" (Marx & Engles, 1970). Neither role is intended to move out of the assigned role, but simply maintain the order of societal norms. Schools assist with the legitimization of the "capitalist or ruling class" and the false sense that the power was earned and not forced (Hextrum, 2014, p. 92). There are exceptions that deviate from the funnel of social class dictating the selectivity of college enrollment. These exceptions are beautiful narratives of triumph breaking through the barrier that exists in the stratified system. It is important to not magnify the exceptions into a false pretense as the norm and pretend the system is working in a just and equitable manner. The truth is most do not propel into a situation of upward mobility and the system is designed this way to maintain the capitalist structure of power holders. Critics feel that reproduction oversimplifies the human nature of resistance and the opportunity to overcome the assignment in the capitalist structure. Giroux (1983) notes that schools view themselves as agents of production toward fulfilling niches in the market. However, upward mobility is hindered if the rate of production is greater than the allotted number of workers needed to fulfill the needs of the owners (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Bowles and Gintis (1976) maintain people have little choice or control, but are playing

the assigned role through reproduction. In short, the dominant culture take their seat at the top, while all others file into their pre-slotted, predetermined space in the capitalist structure of laborers. By design the school is the power holder (Lakomski, 1984). The administration, the curriculum, the rewards, and competitive nature of who gets access to what information and who is held in high regards in each building is an example of the power held in the educational setting (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Bowles and Gintis (1976) address the school as upholding class norms. Urban high schools, which educate the most diverse populations, are known for reinforcing strict behavior control under the guise the administration cannot loosen the reigns in fear of behavior "getting out of hand." Working class parents can accept this type of regimented expectations. The working class are accustomed to following the rules, expectations of authority, punching a time clock to ensure the appropriate reward is obtained as evidence by pay day (Bernstein, 1977) . While suburban schools are known for a plethora of choices in electives, behaviors, and structures put into place to create a more autonomous environment (Bhattacharya, 2017). The choices afforded to the middle class is a familiar system of comfort. Accustomed to choice, the middle class move through life happenings with a smorgasbord of options. The middle-class values autonomy in choice and ability to make independent decisions.

Bowels and Gintis (1976) deterministic viewpoint is vindicated with the current trends in high schools assigning tracks to students as a siphon to move the student toward college bound, career technology centers, or workforce. The students are encouraged to select a track. The track selected determines high school courses and the student is then pushed forward under the guise of the best preparation for intended outcomes. Even though this is selected by the student, the student is guided in 9th grade what track seems to fit their abilities and interests. The sorting process is to "pre-determine" who gets exposed to what curriculum and ideologies as they

become “independent” thinkers (Lakomski, 1984). In conclusion, the concepts of Bowles and Gintis (1976) demonstrates schools are structures in which social class is upheld based on familial placement in the system. The order is maintained by the dominant structure of education. Furthermore, Bowles and Gintis’s (1976) formalizes a correspondence theory.

The correspondence theory pairs the relationship between “hierarchically structured patterns of values, norms, and skills that characterize the workforce and the dynamic class of interaction under capitalism mirrored in social dynamics of the daily classroom occurrences” (Giroux, 1983, p. 266). The hidden curriculum mirrors class, race, and gender that lends itself to reinforcing the dominant class. Marx focuses on the capital nature of reproduction (Anyon, 1983). The owners can never produce enough of a commodity or capital to become an owner. The owners hold all the power in their clutches as capitalism is produced. Marx does not consider the ideology, culture, and politics that sustains the superstructure.

Ideologies

Gramsci (1971) and Althusser (1971) both theorize how the ideologies play into reproduction. The superstructure rises from the base (economy) and reinforces the unequal relationships. While Marx gave little attention or weight to the superstructure. Gramsci (1971) and Althusser (1971) reverse that argument, saying that the base could not exist without the superstructure. The superstructure is what normalizes these unequal relationships, keeps workers showing up for their job day after day to produce, while some workers dream up aspirations that one day they could rise up and become the owner.

Gramsci (1971) adds revolutionary organic moments creating a balance between societal theory and social practices diminishing the stronghold of coercion (Leonardo, 2010). Through moral leadership and dominance by ruling over, the individual is being directed to what is the

desirable outcome for production and capitalist gains. Gramsci (1971) believes ideologies is a mechanism to allow the dominant culture to shape the ideas of the subordinate cultures. Differing from Marxist view, Gramski (1971) divides society into two spheres; the political society and civil society. Both are seen as repressive tools. Both Gramski and Althusser's (1971) see the two spheres as relevant to the prediction of capitalist outcomes.

Althusser (1971) ascribes to the belief that ideologies transpire on the onset of the education process (Leonardo, 2010). The ideology encompasses the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), the interpellation, and subjectification that is believed to occur in the school setting encompassing school structure and daily happenings (Lakomski, 1984). The apparatus in Althusser (1971) theory is the western societies legal and political conditions produced through ideology in conjunction with capitalist exploitation. The ISA's are the structures that include but not limited to: educational institutions, media, family, and religious institutions. Althusser (1971) believed the ISA's is how a person locates their place in the world. The dominant institutions steer the individual toward the unconscious funneling moving toward the belief of a person's place in society as dictated by the dominant culture. The individual is the subject from the onset.

Even at conception, the response by familial habitus and expectations begins the belief of what the future holds for the unborn child (Bourdieu, 1977). As the child enters into formal education substantial reinforcement occurs forming identity. The ideology that forms is a product of the ISA. The person reinforces the funneling by wanting the authorities to be correct in their assessment and beliefs. The individual works toward sustaining behaviors and actions that are consistent with the pre-determined ideologies assigned to the person by the dominant structure. Althusser (1971) defines this as interpellation. It is when the person acts on something first and then becomes to believe it (Leonardo, 2010). For this study the highly qualified student chooses

a community college and then they begin to believe it is not only a good choice, but also a choice made on their own volition. The student reinforces the decision with assigned value to be right, believing the action of choosing was based on free will, with a sound mind acting on the individual's own accord. The assigning value of the choice as "right" or good is an act to perpetuate the production that the dominant institution, including family, assigned. The critics concern is the lack of resistance noted discounting the potential disruption to the funneling process of college choice. Gramsci (1971) believes there is free will and there is human agency present in the capitalist structure.

Social Reproduction

Social reproduction from a Marxist framework is the reproduction of the capitalist system (Bhattacharya, 2017). There are two "conjoined spaces—spaces of production of value (points of production) and spaces for reproduction of labor power" (Bhattacharya, 2017 p. 7). Social reproduction can be defined as the capitalist reproduction of labor by compliant working class. This can be considered a harsh interpretation of capitalism divided into two spheres the labor "owners" and the "workers"**.** The theory derived from Marxist view of capitalism finding the two groups' assignments are not intended to be fluid. The assignment is fixed. There is no room or opportunity to create a shift. Furthermore, social reproduction is described as the dominant class possesses a veil to place over the workers (Willis, 1981). The workers live under the crux of the veil. As a result, the workers only experience the "real world" as much as the veil will allow. The view to the reproduction that occurs is limited by those that possess the power as "owners". Both the "owners" and "workers" play a role to make the system continue and it is not intended for one to become the other. The system is reproduced and maintained in a perpetual manner.

Giroux (1983) added a resistance component to the theories. By raising the student's consciousness, ideologies can help to unlearn some teachings or approach theories from a new perspective. Giroux (1983) notes that ideology is not purely a deterministic lens. Once a person makes some discoveries, they can internalize that information, and begin to resist the system in an attempt to produce unexpected outcomes. This resistance is in the realms of rebelling against the dominant cultures tendency to funnel toward desired outcomes in an attempt to create a disruption and break free of the strongholds of class determinism. The example of this static movement on the continuum toward social mobility would be pronounced by a working-class individual, who breaks through the suffocating grips of class funneling toward a less selective institution and becomes a successful student at a more selective institution than what is the expected norm generated from a particular social class. Then the student living outside the funnel of reproduction and resisting the assigned path excels in the environment, graduates, and becomes gainfully employed with higher earnings and jumping quintiles espousing positive social mobility. This is the hope of the deterministic mindset of college match. Unfortunately, shows this type of projection is an exception not a normalized occurrence in the stratified system of higher education.

Cultural Capital and Cultural Reproduction

Cultural reproduction defines cultural capital as "general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills are passed from one generation to the next" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.13). The four tenets of cultural capital encompassing Bourdieu's theory are: each social class has capital that is assigned specific value, schools assign higher value to upper-class capital and assigns lower value to the children of lower social class, academic achievement is rewarded by wealth and is reproduced by the dominant social class, the school reinforces and rewards this by

transferring merits, awards, and giftedness as false shift of power occurs from social class to academic standings and placements (Richardson, 1998).

As seen in education settings cultural capital plays out as follows. A classroom of school age children rush through the doors as they are greeted and welcomed by the authority figure, the teacher. The teacher greets them. The linguistic advantage is espoused through the child with the ability to converse and describe the events leading up to getting to the first day. The teacher is transfixed by this ability. As a result, the child continuously experiences positive reinforcement to speak up and add context to all group activities. Privilege is granted and the trading post is established between the school and the student possessing the linguistic advantage and capital (Bernstein, 1977). The school grants privilege for production of linguistic skills and culture capital the school did not create, but the privilege the high culture or familial habitus established. As a result, the classroom becomes the habitus to reproduce the same systems mimicking societal happenings of privilege and advantage with those that possess cultural (Anyon, 1983.

Bourdieu rejects linking human agents as the dominant power holders (Giroux, 1983). Bourdieu centers cultural capital on class reproduction that is dominated by the familial habitus. Cultural capital as defined by Bourdieu is "linguistic and cultural competencies that individuals inherit by way of class-located boundaries of their family" (Giroux, 1983, p. 268). The advantages and strategic maneuvering of the system is an example of cultural reproduction theory. The "entitlements" are unbeknownst to households with limited resources and those that lack capital. The theory stemming from Bourdieu's work suggests that social class determines who is able to get the most out of the educational structure and system (McDonough, 1997). The school is designed to be the structure that creates the continuum of "reproduction of society, children of the dominant group must be favored and advantaged within education" (Hextrum,

2014, p. 92). Marginson (2016) stated, “The principal intrinsic limit to social equality of opportunity is the persistence of irreducible differences between families in economic, social, and cultural resources” (p. 425). Naturally, possessing cultural capital allows parents to instruct, train, negotiate, and advocate for ways to create opportunities that they feel will best suit their children’s career goals, potential earnings, or ability to climb the social ladder of upward mobility as it is funneled through experiences. According to Bourdieu, the school plays a hegemonic role through curriculum, acceptance of dominant culture norms, and practices to connect production to the dominant class (Lakomski, 1984).

The design of school curriculum favors the dominant class. Through standardized testing, the language, references, prompts, and readings continuously relate to the students possessing high culture (Anyon, 1983). In 2005, the state writing prompt for fifth grade students was to describe a favorite vacation. Two students with a wide chasm of experiences responded to the same writing prompt and scored based on a rubric assessing voice and details. The student who had traveled for a week across state borders, traveled to other countries, or had extensive cultural encounters was at a far greater advantage versus the fifth-grade student who had gone to a water park once. The divide between the ten-year-old with a passport and a ten-year-old who experiences food insecurity is a perfect example of the disparity in curriculum and assessment design favoring the students in possession of high culture. Bourdieu (1977) also speaks of the linguistic advantage cultural capital provides one student over another. Certain linguistic styles, including animation, interested non-verbal cues, and expressions cause students to become labeled as “gifted” as these attributes align more with dominant culture norms. Contrastingly, more subdued behaviors that may be part of the familial habitus are overlooked and even disregarded, assigning a value that is less than. The linguistic behaviors become normed, and the

privilege of dominant culture is exacerbated in the school system (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Habitus becomes “matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 38). This is conceptualized based on experiences and separated by class, whether a person resides in the dominant or subordinate class (Giroux, 1983). Collectively summarized, habitus is formed through agents and structures. The moment when the child of the worker dreams of becoming a future worker is when we see the system reproducing the expected outcomes and norms (Willis, 1981). The theory suggests a false dichotomy of reproduction when a person believes it is their own choice and decision that funnels them to the expected outcome. “Organizational habitus is the impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual’s behavior through an intermediate organization and family habitus that is reasonable or rationale behavior in context” (McDonough, 1997, p. 158). Cultural capital reproduces as individuals do not stage resistance in maintaining the respective familiar community with little disruption to the hierarchy.

In regard to college choice, the families at the highest income quintile are 77 percent more likely to enroll at the most highly selective institutions, Ivy Leagues, than those at the bottom quintile (Chetty et al., 2017), thus perpetuating the continual reproduction of more opportunity and exposure to high culture than what is afforded to the bottom-tiered students. Furthermore, high-income students are aligned with high-income peers who make similar college choices aligned with the more selective institutions that have the highest graduation rates and expenditures per student (Goodman et al., 2019). In a pluralistic society of education, the structures of class, race, and gender would not be pre-determinants on who was afforded the opportunity to access high culture. The higher education path would afford equal access with few to no barriers or distinctions in regard to SEC. However, the study rejects the pluralistic

viewpoint of how the system produces outcomes, who holds the power, and how a person successfully navigates the system. Both cultural reproduction and organizational habitus maintain the societal order of capitalism. Cultural capital, if successfully tapped into, creates advantages to navigate the institution (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Bastedo et al. (2009) hypothesized that low-income students are less likely to compete for selective admissions and are less likely to be able to afford the higher tuition at the regional and flagship universities, further emphasizing that limited-resource students are being funneled disproportionally to community colleges. As we see, the reproduction occurring from the family to maintain order creates a comfortable continuum.

The hope that the college match philosophy will increase opportunity for marginalized populations is counterintuitive to the design of the higher education system. In fact, as noted earlier college match could be considered a staged resistance to the structure in order to try to create more equality and access to high culture. College match does not factor in reproduction models and how the system is designed is to keep the working class in the space that will produce more workers. As Bourdieu (1977) notes, the structure is favorable to the dominant class and oppresses the lowest quintiles of SEC. "The educational system is, therefore, an important factor in maintaining social inequalities, as students from educationally, financially, and socially privileged families achieve higher educational and professional success and thereby reproduce pattern of social stratification and retain their positions of power" (Kosutic, 2017, p. 153). Undermatch will neither change the stratification of higher education system nor diminish the complexity of the reproduction theories, but it is a notable form of resistance to the funneling that is occurring in the structure of education in America.

Social Mobility

A robust study by Klor de Alva and Christensen (2020) produced research addressing social mobility encompassing 1,107 higher education institutions. A portion of the data refuted social reproduction theory, while other components demonstrated that bachelor's degree attainment is not a guarantor to upward mobility. The study pointed to potential upward mobility for some demographics when attending particular colleges and choosing an employable major situated in a geographic region with a robust labor market. The study included over one million students. Klor de Alva and Christensen (2020) established a formula to track social mobility paired with higher education institution attended[2]. College major is a strong determinant of upward social mobility after completing a bachelor's degree. Lin et al. (2020) addressed college major selection, stating that "students may choose a program because they are passionate about the subject, or they may feel that a particular degree or certificate will position them to make a meaningful contribution to their community" (p.35). Hence, not all success is measured by social mobility and economic gains by the students seeking a higher education degree.

Klor de Alva and Christensen's (2020) findings demonstrated that college selectivity increased mobility, moving from a lower quintile of SEC to a higher quintile of earnings, if the student attended a college with notable graduation rates and pursued an employable major. This demonstrated a correlation for potential social mobility with graduation rates and college selectivity. However, the number of females attending the designated college typically experienced a 24 percent lower mobility rate. Furthermore, the least prestigious colleges, Baccalaureate/Associate degree granting colleges, demonstrated a negative correlation with

[2] The research framed upward mobility as an "Adjusted Mobility Rate" (AMR) calculating the family income at the start of college and then linking if the student benefitted by advancement in social mobility after college attendance and being in the workforce on average between six to eight years. The purpose was to assess what were trends in college attendance and social mobility. The study utilized Baronn's rankings to determine degree of selectivity combined with graduation rates of the institution.

mobility. Colleges with higher percentage rates of white students had lower mobility rates. The colleges that enrolled greater shares of students from other ethnicities, such as Hispanics and African Americans, had no negative associations with mobility. The geographic region in which the college was located impacted upward mobility when earning a sought-after major in a high-demand field.

College education is viewed as the vehicle for upward mobility (Martinez, 2018). The study noted that many students move down in income distribution despite attending college. It is important to note that generational trends of selecting majors that are service-oriented or create a different lifestyle than that of parents can skew the data. It is salient that college major impacted mobility. The findings summarized the over one million students included in the data set. Recognizing some changes in quintiles for select geographical regions when selecting the highly employable majors, the study also revealed the following trends as stated by Klor de Alva and Christensen (2020, p. 3):

a. 6 percent of students who attended the 1,107 colleges dropped by one or more quintiles or remained in the lowest quintile.
b. -9 percent of students who started in the top three quintiles fell to the lowest quintile by the time they reached their late 20s or their early 30s.
c. -18 percent of those who originated in the top income quintile slid down to the lowest two quintiles.
d. -27 percent of students who started in households where their parents' income was in the lowest two quintiles remained stuck at the bottom of the income distribution.

The data demonstrates several assumptions touted by the pluralistic view of higher education. Degree attainment is not a guarantee to upward mobility. Many factors correlate with upward

mobility, including major selected and geographic location. The degree sought and whether or not the student completes the degree are tied to future earnings (Jenkins & Weiss, 2011). Furthermore, it is not necessarily the most highly selective colleges that generate the highest upward mobility, but the students' degree completion and graduation rates, that are relevant to an upward trajectory.

Impacts on Labor Markets

The relationship between quality education paired with employment takes the form of strategic appropriations by distributing the top earnings in the labor market to the individuals who graduate from the most selective and prestigious schools (Klor de Alva & Christensen, 2020). Employers try to establish what the demands are in education, while education entities try to meet the needs of employers, in hopes that the appropriate field of study will meet an employment need (Robbins, 1993). A depiction of this power alliance is framed by the Bordieuan theory examined by Robbins (1993, p. 160):

> Bourdieu's view is that these appropriations are devices adopted by those who possess power in society to ensure that their power is retained. Bourdieu suggests that cultural status and economic power are the joint keystones of class domination but that they can only function jointly if they collude in concealing that they are mutually dependent. Although the dominance of `high' culture and high intellectual achievement is a function of the wealth which gives it distinction, it is in the interest of those in possession of high cultural and intellectual status to assert that these are expressions of intrinsic taste or intelligence. Those who owe their cultural status to inherited wealth and position wish to conceal the vulgarity of its origin whilst those who acquire wealth by vulgar means also immediately aspire to the cultural status which will conceal that they are nouveaux riches.

The two structures are repeatedly holding some portion of the population in high regards while keeping another portion out of the space for social mobility. The blind belief that a person possessing high cultural capital is superior to another person and not acknowledging that this status is inherited not earned maintains the order (Toma, 2000).

"Unequal chances of attending selective institutions also leads to unequal labor markets opportunities, because graduation from a selective institution has a disproportionate impact on labor markets outcomes" (Basteda et al., 2009, p. 2). The stratification of higher education Triventi (2013) refers to is the "degree of variation of selectivity, quality/prestige and labor. The higher the stratification of higher education the more important is the role of social background in the occupational attainment process" (p. 48). Attending a more selective institution often positions a student with more "appealing opportunities following graduation" (Toma, 2000, p.2). Students who are poor have the largest gap of opportunity in the network and position game (Marginson, 2016). Toma (2000) found "the path to the American Dream may be through college, but the expressway to it more often leads through certain types of colleges" (p. 304). Through the stratification of higher education, academic performance and perceived cost barriers can prohibit students from obtaining a path toward upper mobility (Toma, 2000). Linking the stratification of higher education and social reproduction theory to the process of college choice helps create a more robust picture of the hurdles that exist for students who are not from affluent homes that possess cultural capital.

Systemic Barriers to College

The literature depicts several factors that create barriers to navigating the complexities of higher education. There are distinct chasms for students from lower socio-economic classes, marginalized populations, and first-generation college students (DesJardines et al., 2006). These

hurdles are pronounced in college choice and aspirations for social mobility. The federal government acknowledges these barriers and funds initiatives attempting to close the gaps. The greatest barrier to social mobility is socioeconomic class (Marginson, 2016). “High-achieving low-income students do not apply to or enroll in the same quality colleges as their higher-income peers, despite the fact that the students would likely pay very little at these selective institutions” (Hoxby & Avery, 2012, p. 1). Reducing college expenses by living at home is a consistent factor stated of why a first-generation student chooses a community college. The two areas are not mutually exclusive, as we can see by the 2015-2016 fact sheet provided by NASPA, which concluded that 56% of first-generation students’ household median incomes were below $41,000 a year. This group is considered the working class in America. Robbins (1993) wrote that working-class students were excluded from higher education because of social class, not because of their abilities to do the work, giftedness, or intelligence. Their lack of cultural capital puts these students with the SEC disadvantage at a greater deficit than any other qualifier. Cultural capital is how inequalities are replicated (Karp, 2011). This leads to class domination and maintains class order by ensuring that students in the lowest quartile of class are paired with the lowest-tiered colleges (Orr, 2001). The combination of lacking capital to understand cost of college, paired with being first-generation, adds to the barriers these students face. The lack of financial aid realities makes the price of the more select universities seem elusive, an impossible, unreachable option. Likewise, the culture habitus of living in neighborhoods that lack exposure to residents who attended selective colleges is another cultural capital barrier (Hoxby & Avery, 2012).

First-generation

First-generation students are the prime example where we see that organization habitus and social reproduction impact college choice. First-generation students do not navigate college selection with the same background or support as students who are in a family with veteran college goers. Being the first person in a household to go to college, or the first person to complete a degree, accounts for approximately 36 percent of the college-going population (AACC, Fast Facts, 2016). Navigating the highly bureaucratic system can create barriers to first-generation student success (Mechur, 2020). “Complicated language, confusing policies, and inefficient and challenging procedures can be particularly burdensome for first-generation students” (p. 9). These are barriers to becoming admitted and can exacerbate frustrations with the process of getting started.

First-generation college students, compared to continuing-generation college students, have less assistance in preparing for college, feel less supported (heightening the sense of impostorship), and have a harder time feeling connected to the institution (Choy, 2001). These students walk on a college campus and sometimes feel isolated, alone, and scared. Inman and Mayes (1999) conducted a study of over 4,600 community college students to examine differences by levels of parental education, and found that first-generation students were more likely to be older, to work more hours, to have lower family incomes, to be more constrained by proximity to home, and to have more financial dependents to support. With life demands and obligations, a portion of first-generation college students are not afforded the college experience in a traditional fashion where attending college is the primary obligation. Financially-constrained and limited-resource students are burdened by the cost of college. As a result, these students opt to begin at a community college more often, due to the lower tuition rate compared with a regional university, a division one research institution, or a private institution.

According to Rendon (1995), the majority of first-generation college students begin higher education at a two-year institution. Community colleges can be less intimidating to a first-time college student. The population at two-year colleges is more diverse, with more first-generation ethnic and racial minority students enrolled compared to all of our nation's four-year colleges and universities combined (Witt, 1994). Concerns exist that the lack of college choice information may be another significant reason that first-generation students are overrepresented at community colleges (Striplin, 1999). Critics fear that capable students who are not attending a selective institution are not exposed to the optimal higher education experience, which can be a byproduct of their family habitus. A focus of Bourdieu's as noted by Robbins (1993), habitus "means the disposition to act which individuals acquire in the earliest stages of socialization and which they consolidate by their subsequent choices in life" (p. 160). First-generation students lack the familial habitus when approaching higher education.

Among those who overcome the barriers to access and enroll in postsecondary education, students whose parents did not attend college remain at a disadvantage with respect to persisting and degree attainment (Choy, 2001). College enrollment, financial aid, and getting enrolled are not simple processes. The bureaucracy and systems in place can be confusing to a first-generation student, compounded when students are not accustomed to the lingo and have limited parental guidance. The deficit can be overwhelming to a new student, and, at times, crippling. The skillset needed to navigate college is not intrinsic. First-generation students need help and guidance to make informed choices about colleges and involvement in college activities which ultimately have the potential to benefit students' academic progress (Pascarella et al., 2004). In the United States, high schools aim to design programming to attempt to make up for this organization habitus and built-in structural deficit to help students and increase capital. Federal

grants provide additional support, such as Upward Bound, Gear UP, and TRIO. These programs make concerted efforts in helping equip first-generation, low socioeconomic, and minority students to be better prepared to enter higher education. A shift has occurred in the last decade wherein college and career counselors systematically provide more college readiness material. The intent is to pave the road for students to become college bound. However, even with greater preparation methods utilized, it does not remove the chasm that exists for the students who lack vocabulary, knowledge, and a particular type of household environment as they begin college. Acknowledging and reviewing the barriers for these students will establish what gaps exist for first-generation college students.

Community Colleges

The 2020 National Clearinghouse report states that "community college enrollments have dropped by an average of 7.5 percent so far this fall, far more than the 2.5 percent national average decrease for undergraduates at all higher education institutions" (p. 2). The implications for the downward trend in community college enrollment are far-reaching. Xu et al. (2016) state, **"**Concomitant with the surge in tuition and fees associated with higher education attendance, community colleges have increasingly served as a starting point for many baccalaureate-aspiring students, especially students from low-income and minority groups" (p. 36). Community colleges, or two-year institutions, grant associate degrees. Placed in the bottom tier of the stratified system of higher education, community colleges serve the most diverse population, including but not limited to low-income students, minority students, and first-generation students (Xu et al., 2016). Community colleges are the least expensive higher education option. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), community colleges on average cost $5800 less per academic year than public four-year institutions (p. 1).

Historically, data suggest that the top two reasons students attend community college are the location and the price (Wright, 2012). More than one-half of graduates in the first year of college attend a community college, and 38 percent of all undergraduates attend a community college (DesJardins et al., 2006). Undermatch literature raises concerns about who attends a community college and their propensity to reach degree attainment. Bastedo et al. (2011) maintain, "Poor students are increasingly concentrated in community colleges, which has negative effects on baccalaureate attainment" (p. 318).

According to Baime (2015), Senior President of Government Relations and Policy of American Association of Community Colleges, "Community college students, rather than actively choosing between different institutions of higher education, often attend their local community college because it is accessible, affordable and relevant," (p. 4). McDonough's (1997) research includes several examples which relay the view regarding college choice when selecting a community college and financing that decision. Samantha Shaffer's family simply said she was not a star student (GPA 2.8); therefore, she would not be eligible for scholarships. Samantha's parents told her that since she did not know what major she wanted to pursue, she would go to a community college and live at home. "Her mother constrained Samantha to the local community college because of financial considerations" (p. 41). Samantha described her initial disappointment "[I] always thought I was better than a JC [Junior College]. I thought they were frumpy and I did not want to go to one" (p. 40). Samantha decided to attend what was considered a premier community college, DeAnza, and her attitude begin to shift:

> A lot of people go to JC's first . . . they're getting pretty much the same education without paying so much, and then they get a better idea of what they want to do. It's not so frumpy anymore, since I am doing it (p. 41).

Community colleges are criticized for their reported low graduation rates and concerns that the community college does not lead to bachelor's degree attainment. Xu et al. (2016) found "studies comparing the two-and four-year entrants in terms of educational attainment have found that two-year entrants are much less likely to earn a bachelor's degree" (p. 3). However, the findings do not account for the students who do not desire to go to a four-year school, earn a bachelor's degree, or cannot reach the admission requirements set forth by a four-year university. Brint and Karabel (1989) hypothesized that the "diversionary" effects of attending a community college result in students who could attend a four-year university but start at a community college. The college experience suffers due to lack of resources, minimal if any on-campus residential options, the lack of ability to socially integrate to campus, and the lack of opportunity to engage in extra-curricular activities, all of which are thought to impact persistence in a negative manner. In addition, Attewell et al., (2012) noted that the two-year institution advising practices have been blamed for the halting of "academic momentum," which also may lead to a reduction of persistence in degree attainment. Findings indicate that the propensity to graduate on time is lower if a student begins at a community college (Xu et al, 2016).

Reynolds (2012) confined the sample to students whose intentions were to earn a bachelor's degree in eight years. The students beginning at a community college reported degree completion at 25 points lower than students who began at a four-year higher education institution (Reynolds, 2012). In addition, researchers further manipulated the equation by changing the variables to score matching, as formulated by college match, resulting in similar findings on degree completion ranging from "17 percentage points lower" (Monaghan and Atwell, 2015, p. 77) to "21 percentage points lower" in college completion (Long & Kurlaendar, 2009, p. 40).

Conversely, Melguizo et al. (2011) stated "amongst community college students who

successfully transfer to a four-year college, known as vertical transfer, the probability of earning a bachelor's degree seems fairly comparable to that of native four-year students" (p. 4). In addition, Monaghan and Atewell's (2015) study found that if two student groups with similar abilities were being compared, then regardless of whether the student began at a community college or at a four-year university, the students' persistence rate, credits attempted, credits completed, and overall cumulative record were similar.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, the official graduation rate for community colleges is 21 percent (Juszkiewicz, 2016). However, if a student swirls gaining credits from multiple institutions, the graduation rate increases to "39 percent" (Juszkiewicz, p. 41). Swirling is when the student finds courses that accommodate their individual scheduling needs and the student swirls from institution to institution, regardless of the college or university where the course is offered. The method in which the graduation rate is calculated is scrutinized by many community college professionals. The graduation rate is based on a subset of students who begin college in the fall only, are first time degree/certificate seekers, attend full-time, and complete within 150 percent of the normal program completion time at the same college the student initially attended (Juszkiewicz, 2016). Community colleges serve a diverse population. Many low-income students and self-supporting students must juggle work demands in order to be able to attend college. In addition, adult students whose primary responsibility in life is not being a college student can fall below the threshold of maintaining 12 hours of coursework due to life and work responsibilities. Community college students may delay beginning college and decide to begin in January; however, with the current calculations by the National Student Clearinghouse, that subset, January college beginners, would be excluded from graduation calculation. The U.S. Department of Education acknowledges the limitations and is working

toward changes that would include additional factors addressing the abovementioned issues in how graduation rate is calculated (Juszkiewicz, 2016). Poor graduation rates suggest that the community college lacks the ability to fully educate the students, prepare them for the vertical transfer, or provide a college experience. The current system links the graduation rate to the worth of a higher education institution. However, if the graduation rate is calculated including only students who maintained full-time enrollment, which is more similar to a four-year university, the graduation rate increases to 42.9 percent over a three-year timeframe for students who begin at a community college (Juszkiewicz, 2016). The amount of time to completion adds another element to the graduation rates.

Additional concerns have been expressed about the number of remedial courses community colleges require students to enroll in and if the remedial courses are beneficial to the student earning a bachelor's degree on time. The criticisms include cost of the remedial courses, postponing college education, and ineffective instruction. Findings of Bettinger and Long (2005) noted that over 1 billion dollars is spent annually on remedial course work. The effectiveness is circumspect at best. Wilson et al. (2009) note the positive effects of remedial coursework, increasing retention from spring to fall; however, it made no difference in completing an associate degree or transferring to a four-year university. Another systemic barrier is coined as the cooling-out effect.

Cooling-Out Effect. Is the mission of the community college creating a false sense of inclusion, hiding the barriers of meritocracy through policies and practices? The community college is enrolling the highest number of underrepresented populations (Juszkiewz, 2020). The community college mission is to provide access to allow all people to try out college. However, with no academic pre-qualifiers, an unprepared student could be facing a soft denial in the

meritocracy of the stratified higher education system. This occurrence is known as cooling-out effect for some students who may not possess the abilities to become community college graduates and transfer to obtain a bachelor's degree (Clark, 1960).

The cooling-out effect is another way to demonstrate in America that policy makers are allowing everyone an opportunity to seek a higher education degree. However, with no structure shift or changes in delivery of learning outcomes the truth is community colleges are access without the needed support (Kaliszeski, 1988). If the student cannot make progress through each course because they do not possess the intellect or preparedness to earn satisfactory scores, the policy makers still feel a false sense of equality and access. Perpetuating a false sense of access with the mindset, the individual had a chance to try college with no pre-qualifiers of test scores or high school performance as barriers. Community colleges will even allow high school dropouts to enroll with the expectation that within a semester, the student will earn a GED. The community college practices and state policies show evidence of reinforcing social mobility and keeping everything in check sustaining the stratified structure.

The cooling-out effect is one more mechanism to ensure that community college students do not step out of line with societal expectations. Cooling-out effect keeps a ceiling on top of the least qualified students lacking cultural capital and making sure to squander any dreams that do not conform to the societal constraints of the stratified system. Even though the community college is open access, the "check in" is to be certain these students have not "made the mistake of aspiring too high" (Zwerling, 1976, p. 81). This is by design, policies and practices at each institution, and pronounced in the first stage of enrollment.

The cooling-out effect is amplified in community college advising practices and procedures. The process leading to cooling-out is presented in a five-step approach. The first step

leading to cooling-out is the pre-entrance testing to determine course placement. The research (Clark, 1960, Hellmich, 1994, Kaliszeski, 1998) attempts to tie this to the academic advising process, which may be true in some states. However, in Oklahoma, it is the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education policy that determines placement scores and whether a student is qualified to be placed in an on-level for credit course. The test scores determine competencies that can be demonstrated through ACT or ACCUPLACER[3]. The test scores are the guide for advisors of whether the student is required to take remedial courses or can start on level. California updated these policies in the 1990s, with other states to follow, establishing that no single instrument or measure can determine placement; remedial courses are not required; and the institution has a burden to provide evidence that pre-requisites are necessary to enroll in specific courses (Moore et al., 2007). The shift in standards is fighting against meritocracy practices in open-access community colleges and removing barriers, leaving the policies up to the individual state governing boards (Jenkins & Boswell, 2002).

As mentioned before, the remedial courses are known to slow down momentum in degree attainment. Remedial courses have become controversial questioning if the intended outcome of moving the needle from an academic deficit toward academic preparedness occurs from the additional zero-level course completion. This first step to cooling-out effect is another example of how the stratified structure silently strangles out hopes and dreams through delayed progression. The community college's mission is to be open access, but counterintuitively, the first step in Oklahoma is to provide test scores or take a placement test to determine merits based on college capabilities to enroll in courses.

[3] ACCUPLACER is a product created by College Board, typically administered on a community college campus in a computer lab setting. The student can use ACT scores for course placement or choose to retest using ACCUPLACER scores; or, when no ACT test scores are available, the student is required to test to determine course placement.

The next step in advising the community college student is selecting courses. The cooling-out effect is exploited in this function as the advisors review scores and course performance and question degree aspirations (Clark, 1960). An example would be a student who wants to be a pre-engineering major at the community college with plans to transfer to the university to earn a bachelor's degree in engineering, but the student does not like math and does not want to enroll in math courses. The progression of an engineering major is to complete Calculus I, Calculus II, and Calculus III at the community college and then transfer and complete the equivalent to Calculus IV and Calculus V (Differential Equations). When a student does not want to enroll in math courses, the advisor provides the reality of what is ahead for the student. As a result, the student may lessen degree aspirations to a major that is perceived as less rigorous or less math-heavy in degree requirements, such as education or sociology (Bahr, 2004). Another example is when a pre-nursing student has aspirations to be a nurse, but hates science. The advisor's role is to instruct the student about the pre-requisites to be accepted to nursing school. Likewise, the student may change majors. The research links this to cooling-out effect, a slow denial of diminishing dreams. It is a product of the community college and the students who enter without the understanding of what is ahead to pursue specific degrees.

The orientation course is considered step three in the cooling-out effect. By having a student self-examine degree choices, reviewing the degree plan, transfer matrix, and evaluating the road ahead, it is considered a function of cooling-out. Clark (1960) sees this course as a vehicle to have hard conversations of reality and as a result is a cooling-out factor. The community college enrolls the most first-generation students and marginalized populations (Juszkiewz, 2020). The design and intent of the orientation course is to inform and prepare. Furthermore, prestigious highly selective universities also have similar courses, such as freshman

seminar, to acclimate students to campus (Hepworth et al., 2018).

The next phase to cooling-out effect includes the fourth practice of "need for improvement notices" (Clark, 1960, p. 573). Originally these were carbon copy notices to the students that they needed to do better, try harder, or that the current work submitted was not satisfactory. This was also a way for a professor to cover their bases in case a grade appeal occurred, and the professor had evidence that they warned the student that the academic expectations were not being met. In today's higher education landscape, the notices are now submitted by professors as retention alerts. The alerts are for advising offices or student success offices to stage interventions (Lawson et al., 2016).

The fifth item compounding the cooling-out effect is the probationary policy to let the student stay enrolled, but to be on warning that the academic progression and performance is not acceptable. It is the warning indicating if you cannot perform better, you will be withdrawn from the institution. The retention alerts and probation are viewed by Clark (1960) as another vehicle to slow the quiet rejection of the hopes to degree attainment. The phases of the cooling-out effect from the 1960s are not very different from the happenings for today's community college student who is not completing courses at a pace that is considered Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP). In Oklahoma, open access is a chance for all, with no pre-qualifiers, until you enter the building ready to enroll. The cooling-out effect can be classified as cooling-out degree aspirations and reducing social mobility potential, or it can lead to a student leaving college with no degree. Whether the student achieves the milestone of an associate degree or not, many community college students view the time at the community college as the starting point to get to the "real college," meaning the university. If deciding to transfer to the university, another

systemic barrier can occur for the community college student, and that is known as transfer shock.

Transfer Shock. "The transfer function is an essential component of the commitment to access" (UCOP, 2007). Fink (2021) finds four-year universities are doing a better job with the transfer process, but it is not enough. "The community college transfer pathway is a promising mechanism for addressing such inequities (Fink 2021, p.1). Transfer shock experienced by the community college student moving toward a bachelor's degree is another way the system is failing the most diverse populations.

Transfer shock as found by Ishitani and McKintrick (2010) perpetuated the idea that community college students were not as capable of navigating the four-year institution. The shock is evident when transferring credits becomes confusing, there is not a clear pathway, and registering for courses is complicated by the system and unfamiliarity by the transfer student (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). The unclear pathways and articulation agreements being muddled by university jargon resulted in only 8 percent of successful community college transfer students followed the "2+2" pathway (Fink, 2021). Furthermore, the realization that additional courses are needed at the transfer institution to be able to move toward the bachelor's degree caused a slowing down the pursuit of completion. As we consider engagement, community college students also find it more difficult to assimilate to campus and take advantage of the opportunities the university offers (Xu et al., 2016). Lack of engagement has been found to be exasperated barriers for students of color (Fink, 2021). Critical race work by Jain et al., (2011) established five tenets of transfer to the literature. The transfer processes is considered racialized phenomenon. Even though the community college enrollment of Black students and Latino students is substantial, the rate of transfer outcomes and progression toward a bachelor's degree

is low in comparison. Even when controlling for preparation and SEC the rate remains low (Wassmer et al., 2004). The students must have advocates and help while navigating the transfer from sending institution to receiving institution. A shift must occur from believing the transfer is only the responsibility of the sending institution. The university needs to place greater value on the transfer student by pursuing them and providing adequate services for all community college students. For many underrepresented students, the ability to successfully transfer to the university becomes an issue of social mobility. As a result of this disparity in transfer information and assistance students of color are seeking out for profit universities (Jain et al., 2011).

An established transfer culture normalizes the process and makes a commitment to transferring to be as seamless as possible (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). The reception of the transfer student is the responsibility of the university (Jain et al., 2011). A direct response to eliminating transfer shock and the bleeding out of students not being successful upon transfer from the community college is the formation of Community College Baccalaureate (CCB) granting colleges. The CCB provides baccalaureate degree options at a lower cost, creating a pipeline of more access, and students no longer having to worry about the transfer process. 23 states have granted community colleges to become baccalaureate granting institutions removing the barrier of transfer shock (Fulton, 2020).

Community College Baccalaureate Degree Granting Institutions

The pursuit of higher education is tightly paired with obtaining a career**.** Juszkiewz (2020) notes a shift in the timeframe individuals want to earn a degree. The desire for shorter programs located closer to home is appealing. These factors are beneficial to community colleges. The transfer process can bottleneck students with lost credits and slow down the path to

degree completion (Lukszo & Hayes, 2020). As a result, 23 states have granted community colleges as baccalaureate degree institutions (CCB), resulting in the formation of the Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA). This is a response to serve their constituents by establishing baccalaureate programs at local community colleges. The degrees offered are a direct response to the needs of the community and market demands partnering with local businesses. Lin et.al. (2020) demonstrated that social mobility is tied to geographical location and the specific region's labor market, depicting outcomes aligned with neo-institutionalism. The following section will highlight the neo-institutionalism argument, the transfer process, the purpose of the CCB, and the challenges of shifting the mission of the community college in the states that are awarding baccalaureate degrees at local community colleges.

Neo-institutionalism focuses on the local state professionals and policy makers as primary institutional agents (Scott, 1995). This supports the local community college partnership with local business as responsive stakeholder's and partners providing degrees that match labor demands. Neo-institutionalism reduces the impact of power structures of the vertical order. Cohen et al. (2014) note that state policy and officials establish the norms through funding, but it does not trickle down to redirect resources to the community college. It is true that community colleges adapt existing programs to prepare the workforce to survive and compete (Levin, 2001). Community colleges can become eager to fulfill the pipeline of community demands with community college graduates (Levin, 2009). The insight to respond to market demands and matching these demands to the students' degree aspirations is a tricky balance between skills and interests with job market. Notably, the path to transfer does not favor all individuals and can create unwarranted hurdles.

The CCB institutions are noted as an emerging development in higher education (AACC,

2021). The essence of the community college is to meet the changing needs faced by the community and to provide comprehensive programs that serve that need (Van Wagoner, 2004). The number of baccalaureate-granting institutions has increased to 145 public and 46 independent colleges granting 20,700 degrees in 2018-2019 according to AACC Fast Facts (2021). The community college framed the expansion of its mission to meet several demands as well as to increase prestige as it evolved from granting associate degrees to bachelor's degrees (Toma, 2012). Expanded community college offerings create more access to baccalaureate degrees, filling a demand of a competitive workforce with additional educational opportunities (Miller & Slocombe, 2012). Chen (2015) notes that this movement provides a four-year degree at a much lower cost. The community college is responding to workforce demands (Walker, 2005). There is an increased accessibility for all demographics and ethnicities with no loss of credits by staying at the community college to earn a bachelor's degree (Koch & Gardener, 2013). Community colleges are responding to the societal demands that the highest paid jobs require a bachelor's degree. As a result, the community colleges are taking action to match a community labor demand with a student need to complete a degree and become employable. By shifting to four-year degrees at the community colleges, the institutions are alleviating the potential "transfer shock," the missed credits upon transfer, and the additional costs of attending a university. Momentum is not lost if the students remain at the same college they have become familiar with and are able to continue to navigate the familiar culture, becoming fully immersed and socially integrated (Romano-Arnold & Cini, 2013).

Inherent issues have increased when altering the design of a mission and delivering a longer program with no lack of resources. Critics view the community college baccalaureate as "mission creep" and losing sight of the purpose of a community college (Wattenbarger, 2000).

The critics are cognizant that the gross lack of prestige of attending a community college will never supersede the university. Societal trends will never allow a CCB degree to hold the weight or the prestige of a university degree. The movement of the CCB has created some shifts in trends. The community colleges granting baccalaureate degrees are facing an identity crisis with a mission shift from providing the first two years of coursework to becoming the baccalaureate granting institution. Additional services are needed to support the newly developed academic aims (Cohen et al., 2014). To be able to provide additional services, there would need to be increased funding or increased tuition. Improving completion rates will certainly promote social mobility, but only minor improvements can be achieved at most colleges unless additional resources are directed at the most vulnerable students. The level of funding is an issue to support the revised mission of providing a bachelor's degree. Also, when the economy is facing a downward turn and resources are being cut, but community college enrollment increases, it creates a greater demand on the resources currently in place (Romano & Palmer, 2016). In some sectors, the CCBs are experiencing a demographic shift in age, with more students staying at the community college, as evidenced by Ardent Community College (CCB), where the average age of student served decreased from "33 years old to 22 years old" (Martinez, 2018, p. 95). As previously mentioned, the expansion of mission is a response to community needs, and as a result, the number of majors available is limited. There is a substantial focus on meeting the demands of the fields of health care, information technology, and energy (Chen, 2015). Therefore, if a student wants to stay at the community college location because of family obligations or cost benefits, they will be funneled into a concentrated list of majors. If those majors match their skills and career aspirations, then it is a benefit, but if it is not a match, the student may be forced to meet a labor demand that would not be their first degree choice. Chen

(2020) states that CCBs lack the proven track record of the university and should be approached with caution to be certain the degree choice matches degree aspirations.

The social mobility data by Chetty et al. (2017) found that certain community colleges, such as Glendale Community College in Los Angeles, have very high mobility rates for a fixed data set. The research noted a large Armenian population included in this data set and noted that when the Armenian enrollment decreased, the mobility rate decreased as well. The snapshot captured by Chetty et al. (2017) in this large data set boasting of Glendale Community College success is not necessarily able to be reproduced, as it has seen decreases since the shift in enrollment demographics. On the inverse, a number of other community colleges have very low mobility rates and low success rates. North Carolina, for instance, demonstrates such poor mobility rates that there was no advantage for those attending the community college compared with those individuals from age 19-22 with no college at all. "This raises the possibility that these colleges have very low earnings value-added, calling for careful examination of their effectiveness" (Chetty et al., 2017, p. 28). The data continually demonstrates that open-access community colleges with better graduation rates result in a higher propensity for social mobility (Chetty et al., 2017). Klor de Alva and Christensen (2020) found overall institutions classified as "baccalaureate/associate colleges—the least-prestigious university classification on the Carnegie scale—have a negative association with mobility. Compared with students who attend extensive doctoral research universities, students who attend a baccalaureate/associate college have 4 percent lower mobility rates" (p. 18).

The societal benefit of an open-access CCB is to reduce transfer shock, filtering a more diverse population toward degree completion at a cheaper cost while obtaining a bachelor's degree. If the student's desired major matches the degree offered at a CCB, staying at the

community college could be beneficial to the student finishing a bachelor's degree conveniently and at a lower cost, if they are willing to accept the reduced prestige of graduating from the lowest-tiered university. There have been a few anomalies of upward trajectory when graduating from a CCB, if the student lives in the appropriate region and the degree earned is meeting a market demand. The upward trajectory of completing a bachelor's degree at a community college is relevant to the major selected and tightly coupled to what region of the country the student resides in. The CCB is experiencing a split focus on how to provide additional resources to be successful at delivering a bachelor's degree while continuing to serve the students who need to transfer to obtain the degree that matches the intended major the student wants to pursue.

In summary, community colleges are the lowest-funded higher education option. As open-access institutions, they sit at the bottom rung in cost and prestige. The community college enrolls the poorest students. The community college exists as another variable in the systemic design of hierarchy that is disguised as hope for the poor and diverse, but by design intended to be non-disruptive to class order. The community college's attributes do not lend it to become the best college match for the highly qualified student who could benefit from the prestige and capital provided in a university setting. Even though the community colleges are poorly funded in the stratified system with poor completion rates and zero selectivity, highly qualified students are still choosing to start college in these spaces as undermatched students.

Undermatch

Undermatching is a term referring to students who enroll in a college or university for which they are overqualified. Bowen et al. (2009) defines undermatch when a student meets criteria for a higher tiered institution but enrolls in a lower tiered institution. Bastedo et al. (2011) determined "the undermatch hypothesis suggests that there is a significant pool of low socio-

economic-status (SES) students who are attending colleges that are less selective than the ones they could have attended based on academic preparation" (p. 318). The notion of undermatch juxtaposes the misalignment between match and high school performance as a grave disservice to a student's future. Therefore, Smith et al. (2013) revealed that the pipeline of opportunity is narrowed if a student is undermatched, because students do not have the same level of experience as those beginning at a university.

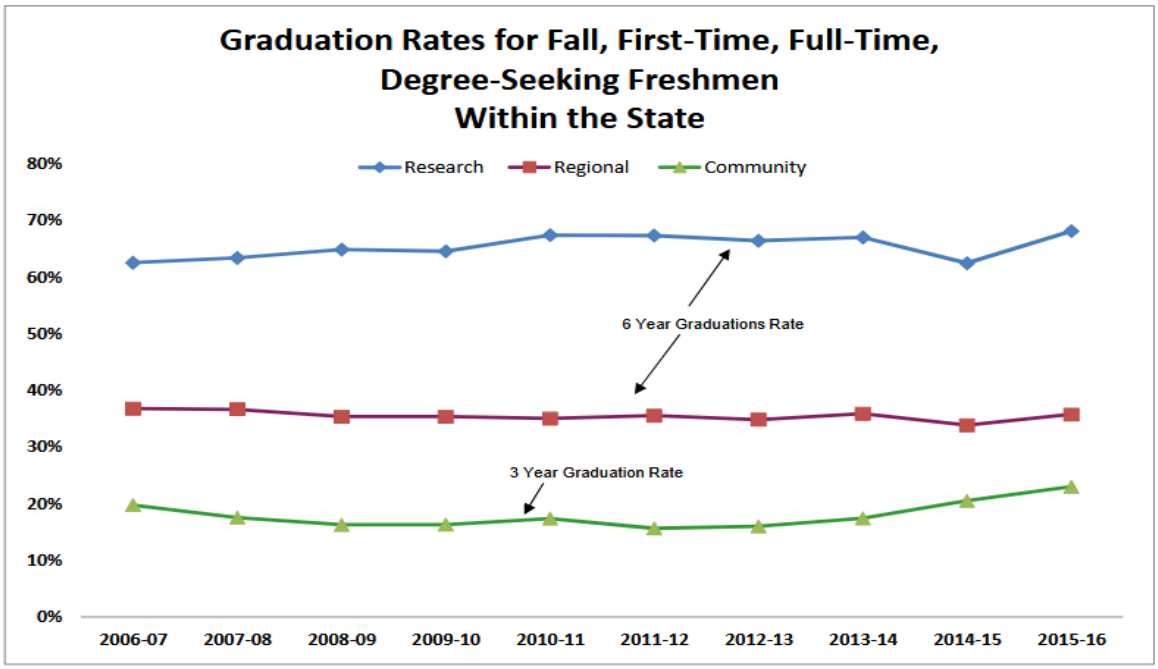
Undermatching manifests the belief that the student's likelihood of obtaining a bachelor's degree, as well as having a rich higher education experience, will ultimately result in lower future earnings (Bowen et al., 2009). Ultimately, the ideology of undermatch echoes that choosing a college that has lower admission standards creates a societal dilemma of access and opportunity. The question of access arises for a multitude of students, including first-generation college students, ethnic minority students, and students with household incomes landing in the bottom two quintiles. The earnings gap between the bachelor's-degree-holding citizen and the non-bachelor's-degree-holding citizen is significant. "Strong reasons for suspecting that undermatching in general—especially among those academically strong students who went to two-year colleges or to no college—has imposed a real penalty both on the individual students and on society in general" (Atkinson & Gieser, 2006, p. 3). If entire sections of the population are not granted equal access and opportunities due to the lack of information presented during the college decision process, the students are potentially being inhibited from future earning potential; therefore, undermatching becomes an issue of economic sustainability.

In 2003, College Match, a non-profit organization, was established to connect low-income high school students to the colleges that the students were qualified to attend. College Match data strongly implies that highly qualified students, regardless of background, are

minimizing opportunity for future degree attainment and overall college experience when choosing to attend a less selective institution such as a community college (Fosnacht, 2014). When considering reproduction theories, college match is a formulated resistance to the funnel that is transpiring for many marginalized populations. Subsequently, studies find that students who were most likely to be undermatched and enrolled in less-selective institutions were typically marginalized students, including African-American, Latino, low-income, and first-generation college students (Bowen et al., 2009). The following studies exemplify marginalized students' undermatch habitus.

Two prominent studies at the forefront of undermatch research include Chicago Public Schools (Healey et al., 2014) and North Carolina High School (Bowen et al., 2009). The first study pertains to Chicago Public Schools (CPS). Conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (2014), this particular study produced numerous reports and papers linking students' abilities to college selectivity, also known as undermatching in CPS. The detailed account depicts students' propensity to obtain a bachelor's degree based on high school performance and college selectivity. Healey et al. (2014) findings relate to the CPS seniors, "high school GPA is a strong indicator of students' preparation for college; only four-year college enrollees with a high school GPA of 3.0 or higher have at least a 50 percent probability of earning a degree within six years" (p. 11). Additionally, Roderick (2006) study determined that students who attended colleges with higher graduation rates were more likely to graduate. Subsequently, if a college reported lower graduation rates, even with the same qualification standards, students consistently graduated at a lower rate. Evidence presented by Xu et al. (2016) suggests that there is a direct correlation between students attending a college with higher admission standards and higher chances for degree attainment.

Figure 4: Graduation Rates by Institution Type (OSRHE, 2017)



The graph demonstrates the correlation between the admission policies and degree attainment. Low graduation rates extrapolate a belief that a two-year institution simply does not provide the best education available. With fewer students graduating, it appears that the two-year colleges are failing to move students forward through the pipeline to college graduation. Undermatch data derived from Healey et al. (2014) argues that a highly qualified student's trajectory is harmed by beginning at a community college. As a result, the argument that is presented by Smith et al. (2013) solidifies that the college graduation rate does have a correlation to degree completion when comparing two students with the same GPA and ACT scores. This establishes the hypothesis that the higher the graduation rate at any given college, the higher the propensity for a student to graduate on time. In summary, the correlation implies that when a student attends a college where less than a quarter of all students graduate, chances are they will not graduate either, even if they have strong qualifications. Jaschik (2008) found that at institutions with higher admission standards, the institutional graduation rates are routinely higher.

Bowen et al. (2009) recounts North Carolina high school students' trends on college enrollment, graduation, and time-to-degree completion. Findings determined that students who are undermatched are less likely to earn bachelor's degrees. The Bowen et al. (2009) study concluded that undermatching occurs at the application stage, and is further complicated when the student does not possess the skills to "navigate the process of gaining access to strong academic programs" (p. 229). If a student is unfamiliar with college admission practices, he or she is at a disadvantage for gaining admission from the onset. The data conclude that students who undermatch primarily do so because of a lack of college choice information.

The lack of information, proper intervention, and a process to plan for college is slated as the primary reason students undermatch (Bowen et. al., 2009). Unfortunately, the preparation for each student is dependent on the specific high school the student attends and the initiative taken by the school to create a college-going curriculum. Not every high school distributes the same information, nor is every high school equitably staffed to make college preparation a priority. Geiger (1993) noted, "Chicago public school study and other research--is that the sorting process is often haphazard, less carefully considered, and less informed than it should be" (p. 46). Despite the undermatch argument regarding lack of college choice options, there are circumstances, financial and other, that lead to a student choosing the open-access community college. Bowen et al. (2009) recognized that a student can make an informed choice and still decide to start a community college because it feels "safer" or "more comfortable" (p. 101). Likewise, "a student might attend a school that is obviously a poor academic match because it enables him to look after family. He might derive sufficient utility from doing this that his college choice is utility maximizing" (Hoxby and Avery, 2012, p.23).

In retrospect, CPS study Bowen et al (2009) concludes, "match is just one component of

finding the right college fit" (p. 100). The Chicago study recaps that college fit is not simply limited to scores, GPAs, and graduation rates. Students may find their niche in a less intimidating environment that focuses on a culture of academic, social, and psychological gains. Smith et al. (2013) recognize the phenomenon that occurs when a student undermatches, "an undermatched student may gain utility from being the 'big fish' in a 'small pond" (p. 252). Gaining a sense of belonging and importance in a college is directly related to overall experience.

Undermatch literature, by its very nature, is prescriptive. In an attempt to maintain the vertical order of higher education, undermatch limits the community college experience, transfer capital gained, and development as a student. The undermatch literature, reinforced by College Board presentations and publications, is limited to graduation rates at the higher education institution and performance indicators that are established during high school (Smith et al., 2013). The hypothesis of undermatch indicates that a student who qualifies for admission at a regional or state university should maintain college match alignment and enroll, hence diminishing any consideration for a community college to potentially provide any benefit, such as the following: money saved, family dynamics, student support, small class size, student development, and the potential experience of attending a community college. Undermatch also diminishes the familial habitus in the college choice decision. Considering reproduction theories, the opportunity provided by the community college is negated for the lack of capital and mobility the student receives as an undermatched community college student. Assisting students to align colleges with abilities can be extremely beneficial to their college choice and could combat the tendency to stay close to home and not consider the other options. When a student's college choice does not match high school performance, the institution the student enrolls in is considered an undermatch. The lens in which the college match and undermatch was created is a

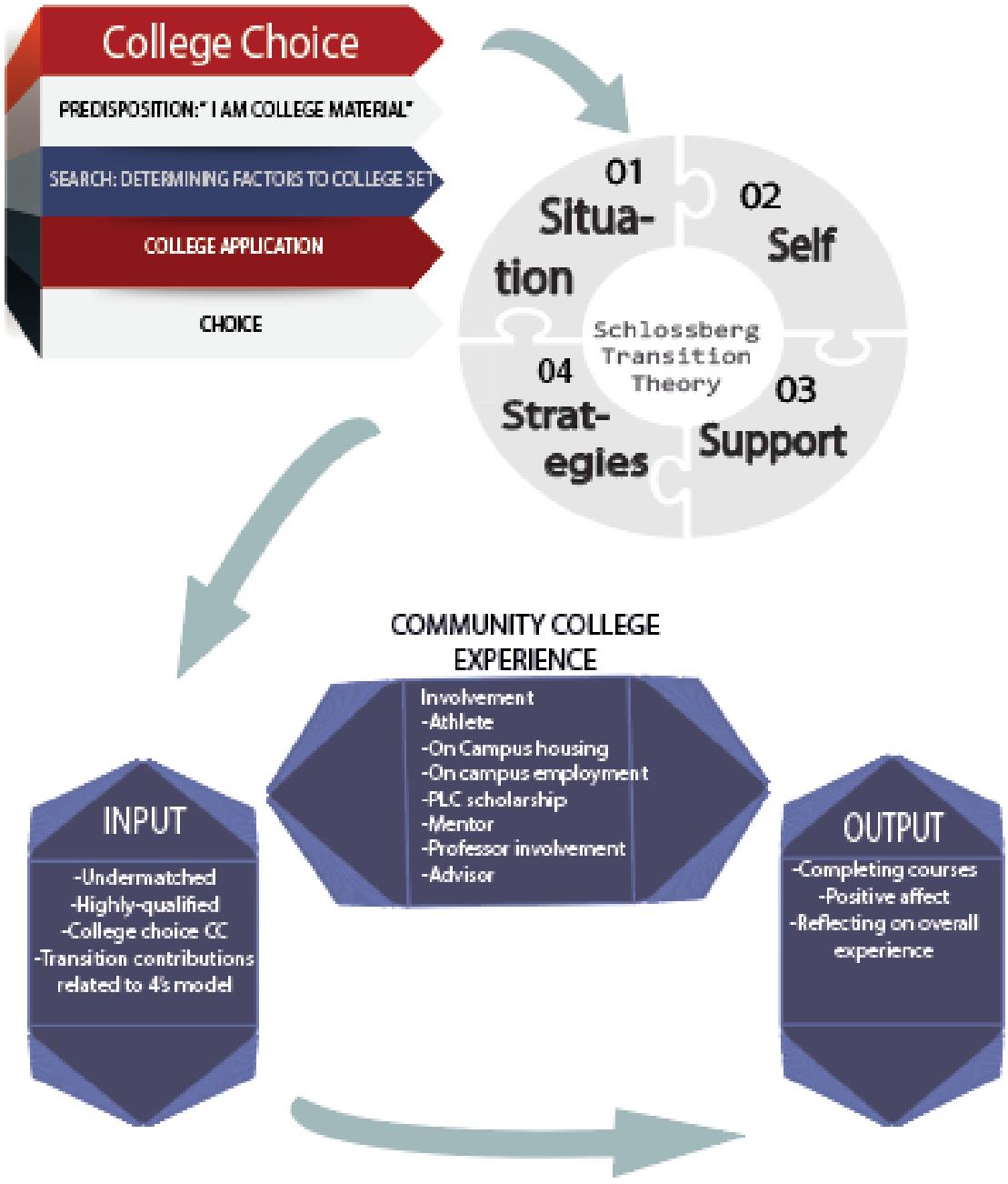
form of resistance to the theories of reproduction. However, the familial habitus and the role of the schools both are critical pieces that lead to college choice and the potential of upward mobility.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical frameworks encapsulate college choice, transition theory, and involvement theory. These three concepts subsequently build upon each other throughout the research process. This research project was conducted at the beginning of the college experience, with a follow-up interview after completing year one at an urban community college. Beginning with the first interview, the participants explored the process and influences of college choice. The next set of interviews explored the students' journeys as they transitioned from high school to college. The application of transition theory acknowledges the role of assets, liabilities, and life stressors contributing to student transition to begin college life. Finally, addressing ideations of Astin's (1984) I-E-O model of involvement theory, the data analysis will review the attributes that contribute to student input, the community college environment, and the output that the students experienced after the first year of college was complete. Figure 5 illustrates how the theoretical frameworks build upon each other, assimilating the overall college experience of an undermatch student attending a community college.

Figure 5: Theoretical Frameworks



College Choice

Selecting a college has numerous variables that can differ greatly among

individuals. The higher education market is flooded with college and university options appealing to different student attributes. The student must determine the type of college or university, the size and number of students enrolled, the expenses including costs and scholarships available, degrees offered, modalities, and location relative to the student's family and community support system. Research finds **"**individual colleges and universities fill different niches in the overall higher education marketplace" (Toma, 2003, p. 303). The variables create a plethora of choices that can become complex as the student weighs out options and attempts to make a sound decision. The college choice model encompasses three broad stages (Davis-Van Atta & Carrier, 1986; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). For the purpose of this study, the widely accepted model of Hossler and Gallagher (1987) will be utilized. The stages consist of predisposition, search, and choice. Cost has been added to the three-phase choice in recent years. The price of higher education and the after-graduation debt ratio has developed as a notable factor becoming more prominent in decision making in final college choice enrollment (Kelly et al., 2016).

The foundation of college choice is established during the first stage, as an individual begins to form beliefs about college. Haslerig (2013) recognizes that "during the predisposition stage, which is closely aligned with the development of aspirations, students decide whether they want to attend college" (p. 31). According to DesJardins et al. (2006), a seed is planted that college may be the best avenue for the student to reach goals and aspirations. The idea of college attendance can form at an early age and be reinforced through primary school, middle school, and high school (Hossler et al., 1999). Continually constructing college ideations, the student formulates a list of college options. Students begin to devise beliefs and ideas around career options as well. The choice is narrowed as the student identifies with various

careers, linking college choice to goals. If a student narrows a career to a specific field that requires a college degree, the movement toward college attendance is further established. As a result, the decision that college is part of the foreseeable future manifests in the student and can result in a shift in behaviors, class choice, and high school performance. The belief that college is part of the future lends itself to college preparatory behavior influencing recommended college bound courses, with the hope of becoming more academically prepared for college acceptance and attendance (DesJardines et al., 2006).

The second stage, search, has two components. Part one includes the initial search to identify colleges that are of interest and that may be viable options. During the search stage, the student makes considerations of the type of college or university, the programs offered, campus life, housing arrangements, size, distance from home, and cost. McDonough (1997) stated, "For high school students who are choosing a college, their academic achievement, class background, and high school's perspective on desirable college destinations will shape how they perceive their higher education opportunities" (p. 2).

The search stage is often spearheaded by a high school counselor, a teacher, a coach, a pastor, a family member, or peers. Haslerig (2013) found that "student choices were dependent on their habitus-not just their sense of identity but, inertia, their identity in relation to group membership and representation" (p. 32). The environment in which the student is immersed influences the search phase. The familial habitus is influential in the search phase. The sibling effect and parental experiences impact college choice. The research produced by the Lumina Foundation acknowledges the role of the sibling effect and its potential impact on college choice (Goodman et al., 2012). The report defines four behaviors of sibling effect and college choice:

1. Nearly one-third of younger siblings applied to the same colleges as their older siblings,

with one-fifth attending the same institution.

2. Older siblings attending college influenced younger siblings planning to attend college, and the quality of the institution was closely related.
3. The indicators of following in the sibling's footsteps had little variance by income, race, or location.
4. The closer the siblings were in age and academic abilities, noted by test scores, the more likely the siblings would attend the same college or university.

The research renames the sibling as a peer, calling this phenomenon the spillover effect and noting that the information of the sibling college experience spills over to the younger sibling (Smith et al., 2020). The information transmitted cannot be obtained by any other means than from sibling to sibling or parents, restating the older child's experience at a given campus. College websites, mailings, advertisements, and all other recruitment means cannot provide this insider information, and as a result, sibling information has more power than any other form of transmission. Goodman et al. (2019) writes, "Younger siblings may place a particularly high weight on their older siblings' college experiences, given the educational success of a close family member may be more salient and predictive of one's own success than less personalized sources of information" (p. 22). The transfer of information along with compounded reverberations from family habitus increases the sibling effect.

Highly qualified students in rural and poor school districts, described by Smith et al. (2013), were noted as being greatly influenced by the exposure to populations of like peers and more likely to undermatch. McDonough (1997) argues students' peers influence the kinds of colleges in which the student perceives they would be most comfortable. Likewise, students seek to be around other students like themselves, occasionally choosing less selective colleges as a

result. Where a student attends high school impacts the level of college-going culture the student encounters. According to College Board (2006), school behavior sets the tone for a college-going environment, preparing not only students, but also parents, for college-going materials. Creating high standards for all students is pertinent to shifting the culture and creating community partners to support and share resources with the community. Many high schools have created programs and initiatives, making strides to enhance the college-going culture. As described by Pathways to College Network (Agenda, 2004), the purpose is to help the underserved students, provide a range of college-preparatory tools for students and families, embrace varied learning styles, involve leaders and community members, sustain the manpower to effectively maintain the college-going environment, and assess policy and procedures to ensure they align with the mission that all students are able to attend college. The high school environment influences the search stage. Students' access to college-going culture and information is crucial during these impressionable years of high school. The school sets the tone for expectations about college, especially when the family is not familiar with the higher education rhetoric and processes. The system can be complex and difficult to navigate for the students who are first-generation and lack the college-going experience to rely on as they approach choice. As the search stage progresses, the student becomes aware of admission standards and begins to take the entrance exams, such as the ACT or SAT. When the student decides to send the entrance exam scores to specific colleges and universities, this is known as the "choice set" (DesJardins et al., 2006). The application signifies the end of the search phase.

The final stage, choice, is the actual enrollment and college attendance. At this stage, the college or university admits the student. Subsequently, the student decides whether or not to attend. Studies found that the choice stage is a compilation of student characteristics, cost,

perceptions, and individual preferences of campus size, location, and degrees offered (Fuller, Manski, & Wise, 1982; Hossler et al., 1989). Students will be encouraged to complete a Free Application of Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to help defray costs (DesJardins et al., 2002). Students then evaluate the family's expected contribution, scholarship offerings, and out-of-pocket expenses to make the final decision of where to attend college. When the student sorts through the various factors of college cost, location, and degree offerings and determines how it all fits together, the student may focus on a specific institution and claim it as a match. Then the student will move forward to the next step of college enrollment. College choice is a complex process. It incorporates a broad scope of circumstances that come together to make the student feel that the college they select is the right fit (McDonough, 1997).

Additional research has expanded the search stages to include financial consideration. According to Kelly et al. (2016), as tuition costs climb, "affordability is even more important to where a student enrolls. For many families, tuition costs and the availability of financial aid are the leading considerations in college enrollment" (p. 65). Price responsiveness and financial aid award packages have been most prominent when accounting for race (Light & Strayer, 2002; Tobias, 2002), household income (Dynarski, 2003), and education level of the students' parents (Keane, 2002). Kelly, et al. (2016) indicate that "low costs and availability of aid were major factors in college choice. Subsequently, 93.5 percent of these students were enrolled in colleges" where the student "did not have to borrow more than 25 percent of the household income" (p. 69). When cost consideration is at the forefront of the decision-making process, the rate of mismatch increases. For instance, Kelly et al. (2016) notes, "the rate of matching 'affordable options' are driven by students enrolling in a two-year college, as 74 percent of average-performing students enrolled in a two-year college and did not take out loans"

(p. 69). Adding cost consideration to the college choice equation supports the concerns that once cost is accounted for, students who reside in the lower quintile undermatch the most frequently. As a result, Kelly et al. (2016) found that students with limited resources identified cost as a "key driver" (p. 153). This cost issue contributes to undermatching in the final stages of college choice. An additional study, McDonough (1997), unpacks the differences from limited-resource families versus more affluent families as associating choice with overall price and perceived value.

McDonough's (1997) study includes excerpts of high school students' various views about finances and college choice. For instance, Cathy Ross viewed high school graduation as the threshold to no longer burden her parents financially. She felt compelled to be independent and not rely on her parents to support her. As a result, Cathy expresses college choice in the following realm. "Why pay $700 or whatever it is at State when you could pay $50 at City and get general ed there? I mean, even though it's not as good a school" (p. 143). Another participant in the McDonough study, named Kay, was beginning at a community college and the family was not as concerned about cost. "Paying for college was a consideration in the broadest of possible terms, but not much of an issue because Kay was going to the local community college. Her father had some money saved and his boss would contribute some money, so she was not really worried about financing for school until she goes to what she calls 'a real college'" (p. 40). Hence, the tuition, fees, and other costs associated with college expenses do impact choice for many students, circling back to the stratified system of higher education and the implications for access. As you can see, the system by design is perpetuating exclusive environments. Furthermore, the system perpetuates the undermatch concern because a natural funnel is occurring to steer a segment of the population toward a particular type of college choice

that may not be the best fit for the students' skills, abilities, intended college major, or future upward mobility and career trajectory.

Transition Theory (Schlossberg)

Dr. Nancy Schlossberg began her work in transition theory as a psychologist and a professor. She recognized that transitions in life left many adults confused and needing assistance. The work was designed for members of helping fields, such as psychologists and sociologists, to recognize the stages, evaluate the individual needs, and help people in transition with coping strategies (Anderson et al., 2012). In 1995, Schlossberg partnered with Chickering and applied transition theory to the transition through college. Together, they framed the stages as "moving in, moving through, and moving out" (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995). When a student begins college, it is a transition from the life and routine that is familiar. A transition is "any event, or non-event, [which] results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles" (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 33). Undoubtedly changes occur, the manner in which the student adapts to the changes is individualized. How a student conceptualizes the change determines the individual response to the transition. The responses to the transition are classified as follows (Goodman et al., 2006):

a.) anticipated transitions which occur predictably

b.) unanticipated transitions: not predictable or scheduled

c.) non-events: personal related to individual aspirations

For the study, the participants planned and prepared for college attendance immediately following high school graduation, constituting an anticipated transition. The anticipated transition is part of the unfolding life cycle that has been established by the students' individual community. Going to college has been an accepted next step throughout high school, and the

college-going preparations have been in motion for years. This is an anticipated transition. Theorists have explained transitions as turning points between two stages of stability (Levinson, 1986). Developmental adjustments such as going to college create a set of unique challenges with times to transform and develop (Bridges, 1980; Schlossberg et al., 1995). “Moving through a transition requires letting go of aspects of the self, letting go of former roles, and learning new roles” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 30). Even when a transition is positive, it still creates an adjustment period, with various feelings that can cause confusion and conflict in the individual. The individual’s appraisal of the situation and how they respond to these changes constitutes the responses to the changes occurring in one’s life (Anderson et al, 2012). Throughout the development process, the student will teeter between the two roles, as shifting toward the new role evolves over a lifetime. Three scenarios can play out for the new college student during the transition to start college:

1. The student has had limited change and any break in routine creates stress and is unfamiliar.
2. The student experiences lots of changes and as a result has learned to cope due to increased adaptability.
3. The student has had traumatic changes which have led to the onset of anxiety and fear anytime something new presents itself.

First-year college students can experience another kind of transition, known as the unanticipated transition. Unanticipated transitions can develop when a student is not admitted to their first college choice, scholarship monies did not provide as much funding as hoped, student housing decision changes due to the cost or location of a college or university, a change in housing roommate assignment takes place, the location and cost of college causes a shocking

reality check for the student, the amount of aid or loans changes, the commitment of the parent in supporting the student during college shifts, the cost of books increases, the demands of coursework become unwieldy, the balance of being a student athlete becomes difficult, and other unforeseen obstacles or hurdles the student has to face. For this study, examples of non-events are as follows: grades that the student is not accustomed to earning, change of major, change of relationship status, or variances in employment status. These items all factor into the transition of becoming an independent college student with unexpected occurrences from previous experiences.

The 4S's System

The 4S's maintains four distinct variables–situation, self, support, and strategies–that are major contributing factors influencing the individuals' coping mechanisms (Anderson et. al., 2012). These variables also consider the liabilities and assets at the time of transition and the role in adaptation that can transpire.

The situation variable accounts for what is transpiring at the time of the transition. As the individual frames the events that are occurring in their life, there is also acknowledgement of contributing factors of multiple stressors inhibiting the ability to cope with change. For instance, a first-year college student begins classes and subsequently a parent is diagnosed with cancer. Depending on the amount of assets and weight of liabilities, the transition can be impacted because of the current situation. The student's response to the life stressor can be negotiated depending on the level of engagement with the environment, including relationships and coursework. Multiple stressors can include significant life events or an accumulation of numerous small instances that collide during the same time frame. When these incidences are coupled with an unexpected situation, the result can create mounting stressors. The response to

the situation variable is dependent on assets and liabilities the student has in their pocket relating to how equipped the student is to handle the circumstances in front of them during the transition.

Self as a variable is directly related to a person's capacity to face stressors. An individual's mindset plays a role in their ability to cope. Interestingly, an individual's capacity to handle stressors can fluctuate depending on the timing and the nature of the stressors. A person's ability to maintain composure during one season of stressors is not always indicative of whether they will be equipped to handle a similar situation in a different season. At times, anything extra and unexpected can trigger an unforeseen response. The burden feels especially heavy during this particular crossroads and season. Self is not always predictable when new and unforeseen circumstances transpire, and a person has to try to carry the load. When stressors accumulate, unpredictable responses from the individual can occur and drastically impact the ability to transition and engage.

The support variable plays a substantial role in a person's ability to cope during transitions. The support mechanisms include but are not limited to family units, network of friends, the institution they are associated with, the sense of community, and having resources (Lowenthal & Weiss, 1976). The social support helps mobilize, share burdens, and provide guidance, contributing to support of personal well-being, providing affirmations, connection, and aid to the student's overall well-being (Caplan, 1976). The approach a person takes to work through a transition will influence how the individual assesses the situation and how they will respond. An effective coping strategy may work in one situation, but may be inadequate in an unpredicted or new circumstance. Support systems and community can offer a variety of coping mechanisms, suggestions, and resources. One strategy may be an acceptable tool for one individual and not be effective with another person experiencing the same issue with similar

circumstances. That is why it is crucial to adequately conceptualize and assess the assets and liabilities of the person in transition at that particular time in their life.

The asset and liability consideration is the sum of support, resources, and ability to take action in their own narrative at this particular junction. The appraisal of the transition is key. Then, as the person goes through the transition, reappraisal occurs (Sussman, 1972). This reappraisal and response is broken down into structural (availability of options) and psychological (mental and emotional ability to cope with the transition). Applying transition theory to beginning college and overall college experience moves us toward the historical student affairs concept in Astin's (1984) involvement theory. The support variable is in congruence with components of involvement theory and the interaction and support provided by services on campus that can potentially increase assets, leading to healthier transitions, higher overall satisfaction, and matriculation.

Adapted Astin's Student Involvement Model

For the purpose of the study, Astin's (1984) I-E-O model of student involvement was adapted for applicability to the participants of the study, the environment of the community college, and the overall experience. Student involvement is formulated in relation to the amount of time and energy that is devoted to engagement in college (Astin, 1991). A "highly involved student" is one who, for example, "devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students" (Astin, 1984, p. 518). The researcher acknowledges the critics and limitations of Astin's work. The original I-E-O model is not inclusive of the current college-going population. Furthermore, the work does not include community colleges and is relegated to the four-year university experience. Hence, the researcher adapted the model with a broader

framework including the participants' unique attributes and including community college students.

Historically, the work of Astin (1993) formulates the factors in college experience: the input, environment, and output leading to the overall college experience. The input (I) variable stated by Astin (1993) includes the following: academic major, enrollment status, place of residency, participation in the first-year seminar, grade earned in the first-year seminar, and degree sought by the individual. The environmental factors not only help with transition, but also subsequent enrollment from the first semester to the second semester, which include the following: number of hours worked, number of hours spent on academics per week, contacts with faculty outside of the classroom, contacts with academic advisor, use of basic skills, tutoring center, and use of career advising center, defining involvement as the amount of energy and investment a student expends to the academic experience (Astin, 1991). The theory is grounded in five postulates.

1. Involvement refers to the investment and energy in various college-type activities, such as campus events, intramurals, study groups, volunteer opportunities.

2. The amount a student invests in being engaged with the campus is individualized as far as what they get out of that interaction. The engagement typically occurs with slight progression, building attachment and belonging to the institution.

3. Quantitative metrics can be measured by the amount of time that involvement transpires, while qualitative data can be ascertained by the amount of attention and the impact the involvement has on college ideation, involvement, and belonging.

4. Quantity and quality of time on tasks and engaged increases input.. Involvement theory subscribes to the idea that the more input, the greater the output will be.

5. Programming and policies are only effective if they create an opportunity for transformational growth as the student becomes increasingly invested, resulting in greater exertion of energy, time, and engagement.

The adapted model of I-E-O considers the attributes of the study participants and the threads that bind their narratives as undermatch students attending an urban community college. The input for the study is as follows: 24 or higher on ACT, highly qualified student attending a community college, relevant factors to college choice, the transition to college as told by the narratives, and the classification of being undermatched. The research was conducted at an urban community college, the model now being expanded from a university college experience to a community college experience, the environment variable directly related to the urban community college. The students noted involvement as described in their narratives with factors relating specifically to the community college. The environment and involvement for the study included, but was not limited to, the following: college athlete, on-campus housing, on-campus employment, PLC scholarship recipient, mentors, support, advisors, engaged professors, and a sense of belonging. The excepts can then be analyzed through the overall college experience as described in the narratives.

The three theoretical frameworks encapsulate the purpose of the study as the students navigate college choice, selecting a college that is regarded as an undermatch highly qualified student. The transition theory helps explain the opportunities for adaptation to the new environment and whether or not the student gains a sense of belonging in that space. The adaptation of Astin's I-E-O model allows the researcher to take the narratives and apply the variables of students' input as highly qualified students attending a community college. The environment each participant experienced due to their activities, engagement, or lack thereof is

representative of what can account for participants' community college experience filling a gap in relating student affairs involvement to two-year institutions. The second narratives describe the student experience thus far in year one as an undermatched community college student with different attributes, backgrounds, and aspirations.

CHAPTER 4 METHOD

Methodology

The purpose of the longitudinal, qualitative study was to illuminate the narratives of the highly qualified student who selected a community college to begin their higher education journey. Community college choice was discussed in the first data set of interviews. Furthermore, the qualitative research methods are effective in improving our understanding of an area that has not been previously explored (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). This approach allows the participant's voice to uncover their personal views and lived experience by incorporating the "presence of voice in the text" (Eisner, 1991, p. 36). According to Bruce (2008), "stories describe human knowledge regarding experience and action" (p. 323). As the participant's narrative unfolds, it provides rich, meaningful data. Likewise, it is a vehicle to evoke emotion and construct rich data that overlap with patterns demonstrating the process and construction of meaning. The meaning the individual assigns to a given topic or circumstance is qualitative in nature (Creswell, 2014). The narrative stories are "socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world" (Merriman, 2013, p. 3). The research was in alignment, complementing the theoretical frameworks selected.

Experiences, personal stories, and meaning from the perspective of highly qualified community college students are unveiled as the participants navigate college choice process, transition to college, and community college engagement. Qualitative methods which include narratives allow for the construction of meaning about an individual's experiences, culture, and their familial habitus (Patton, 2015). The narrative approach includes interaction between the researcher and the participants, over time, in a place or series of places (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The research questions acted as a guide for the qualitative research.

Research Questions

The primary purpose of the study was to explore the assumptions of college match by unpacking the college selection process of academically qualified high school students as they selected a college that fell below their academic capabilities and qualifications. The journey of each student's lived experience is explored as the student approaches college choice, transition, and the first year of college experience. Each student discussed their personal transition to college, including successes, barriers, and challenges of making the transition. After completing year one, each participant reflected on their personal experience as a community college student. The research questions consisted of interconnected components such as the following:

1. Why do highly qualified students choose to attend a community college?
2. How do highly qualified college bound students make meaning of the transition to college?
3. How do highly qualified students view the overall first-year experience at a community college?
4. How do the participants college experiences relate to being undermatched?

The purpose of the study is to explore the college choice of the highly qualified student, the transition to college, and to explore the adapted student involvement model to determine if the community college provides a student experience for the student who could have attended a higher-tiered college or university.

Epistemology

As stated previously, I ascribe to the constructivist's epistemology, acknowledging the role of experiences contributing to my positionality and concept of knowing. Identifying my personal values, assumptions. and biases is critical as an instrument to the data interpretation

(Yin, 2003). As a narrative researcher, it is vital to understand the exercise of being reflexive. Etherington (2004) frames reflexive research as this:

> (The) ability to notice our response to the world around us, other people and events, and to use that knowledge to inform our actions, communications and understandings. To be reflexive we need to be aware of our personal responses and to be able to make choices about them. We also need to be aware of the personal, social, and cultural context in which we live and work and to understand how context impacts the ways we interpret our world (p. 19).

The qualitative practice of reflexivity allows the researcher to consider positionality, privilege, social capital, and cultural capital, enhancing the researcher's ability to approach the interviews and analysis with an increased awareness. Freeman (2007) determined that attending to the whole of human life is filled with ambiguity, messiness, and beauty. The constructivist's epistemology acknowledges the influence of experience contributing to the researcher's positionality and concept of knowing. I was positioned "in the midst–located somewhere along the dimension of time, place, the personal, and the social" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63). As a professional, positioned among students, I recognized the presence of the highly qualified, "undermatched" students at an urban community college campus. The highly qualified students attending a community college generated curiosity and the desire to hear the story of the "undermatched" students and how they made the choice to be community college students.

The constructivist's epistemology accredits experience as knowing. The overarching principle of narrative data is when stories encapsulate and frame the experience (Conle,, 2010). The study focuses on the students' experience at a two-year higher education institution. The data analysis provides the emerging themes in relation to interaction with campus and the

influence on experience as determined by the students. The praxis requires embodied understanding. Latta and Kim (2009) found that "as educators dwell and build relationships among self, others, and subject matter, the narratives avail opportunities for educators to live in between these entities" (p. 139). As the student narrates the experience, a rich description is provided that relays more than surface data. The narratives provide insight to the lived experience. As a result, the story unfolds, providing a more vivid and personal account of what is substantial and meaningful as it brings to life the happenings that are far more telling of the human aspect of the experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The constructivist epistemology shaped my methods as the participants told their stories. The meaning emerged and connected to the literature from the personal accounts of choice, transition, and outcome of overall experience.

Researcher Positionality

I am a constructivist and find that meaning is derived from lived experiences. I came to this research topic through my personal experience of starting college as a first-generation community college student, and the stark contrast with the community college students I was witnessing nearly twenty years later as a student affairs practitioner. As a result, my approach to the research was a narrative study. Being situated amongst highly qualified students provided insight to their personal journeys, which led to the research questions. I recognize the intersection and triangulation of personal and professional identity as an alumna of an urban community college, a former high school counselor, and a current student affairs practitioner coming together to influence, inform, and inspire the research.

As a first-generation college student, I began college at an urban community college. My college choice was dictated by finances and the lack of knowledge of college options available. I did not have any means to pay for college. As I approached college attendance, I did not have a

documented financial need due to my parents' yearly earnings. With no assistance from financial aid and no assistance from my family, I had to fund my own education. Twenty years later, I became employed at the same community college I had attended. As a student affairs professional, I began to have daily interactions encountering highly qualified students who had chosen to attend a community college. It was not the second choice or only choice for these students. It was these qualified, capable students' first choice. At first, this caught me by surprise. Many of the students at the community college appeared to be high caliber and highly capable students who would easily fit in the university setting. Being immersed in the midst of these capable students caused me conflict. My personal community college experience was one of isolation. In contrast, in the community college population I was serving, the students were involved and highly engaged with the campus.

When I was relegated to attend a community college, I felt slighted that I did not have the traditional college experience that my high school classmates were afforded. I have never lived in student housing. I have never had a meal plan. I have never just hung out in a common space like a library. I have never had a group or a club to be a part of or be included in. I was not in a sorority. I navigated college very much alone. I correlated the lack of college experience with starting at a community college. During my undergraduate degree, I focused on working to help fund my courses, and every semester trying to figure out how to get to the finish line of degree attainment and start real life. My community college experience felt like a transactional process of taking courses, passing classes, and moving from semester to semester, inching toward a bachelor's degree. I had personally subscribed to the viewpoint that beginning at a community college was for individuals who had no financial support, were first-generation, and, quite frankly, had no path to explore other options.

It is not uncommon that the identity as a parent tends to push us to strive to make sure that our children are afforded opportunities that may not have been made available during our own childhoods. Attending a university has been extremely important to me as I raised three children. My enrollment in a community college was transactional as I hustled from work to class every day and felt very alone a majority of the time.

As a result, my children have been steered toward a university experience. My children's college choice journey was based on the following criteria: degrees offered, scholarships, Greek life, college game day, location, and, finally, cost. As a community college employee, the conflict between home and work life was compartmentalized. As the former director of all recruitment efforts and campus events at an urban community college, my curiosity was piqued to understand why capable students with university options would choose to attend a community college.

As a higher education student affairs practitioner and a college admission professional known throughout the state, I became keenly aware of current trends influencing college choice and impacting how college and career counselors spoke to high school students. My office became a resource for the following: college choice, expanded college vocabulary, and disseminating knowledge about the various types of college options enhancing informed college decisions for high school students. I became versed in issues facing higher education and acknowledged I was going to be able to act as an instrument to interpret the data collected in this study, sifting through college choice, college transition, college fit, and college experience.

Methods

The qualitative research design was longitudinal, over two semesters, collecting two data sets. The methods encompassed the selection of student participants, sample included in the

study, interview protocol, and the constant comparative data analysis. Nine highly qualified, undermatched students agreed to participate in the study. Each student was asked if they preferred a pseudonym, and each student enthusiastically proclaimed they wanted their name to be used in the study. Of the students participating in the first data set, eight proceeded to the second data set. The students shared their individual experiences leading up to college choice. Then the students reflected on what their experiences had been as first-year urban community college students. I examined the remaining data by filtering through the lens of the theoretical frameworks of Schlossberg's (2006) Adult Development Theory of transition and the adapted model of Astin's I-E-O model of student involvement.

The qualitative approach was to become familiar with highly qualified students' individual stories regarding college choice, transition to college, and involvement and experience of "undermatched," first-year, urban community college students (Creswell, 2014; Plano et al., 2008). The lived experience of community college students has not been well researched, thus leaving gaping holes in the student affairs community college literature. The study addressed the gaps by exploring the narratives and personal perspectives shared by community college students with regard to the college selection process, transition and acclimation to college, and, finally, the first year of the college experience. The study provides valuable insight into the experiences of highly qualified students attending an urban community college.

The research began as I was employed as a student affairs practitioner at an urban community college. The second data set was concluded after I resigned from my post at the community college and began working at a university. Reissman (2008) describes narratives as an invitation to "enter the perspective of the narrator" (p. 8). The researcher aimed to analyze the data through the narrator lens and remove any preconceived notions of experience or community

college choice. I focused on the experience as told today by the highly qualified student. Patton (2002) contends that qualitative researchers "take us, as readers, into the time and place of the observation to know what it was like to have been there. They capture and communicate someone else's experience of the world in his or her own words" (p. 272). As a constructivist, I believe that meaning is built as the subject makes sense of experiences and environment; the goal of research is to unearth the subjective voice of the participant. The participants are the experts of their own stories, constructing meaning and their own realities. The meanings are complex, based on their own experiences and interpretations.

In this study, the qualitative data gives voice to the themes relayed by the participants' community college experiences from their perspective, and brings understanding to the process of college choice for undermatched students. The narratives peel back the ways in which factors such as high school attended, peers, family unit, community, and culture influenced community college choice. Furthermore, the narratives considered how the contributing factors of self-efficacy and degree aspirations influenced the students' decision to attend a lower-tiered higher education institution. During the second interview, the participants were prompted to reflect, and encouraged to relay their personal experience of being an undermatched student at a community college. The second data set allowed the students to examine individual lived experience over the last two semesters.

The construction of meaning is also formed by interactions with others; therefore, the research also focused on the relationships that were instrumental in the college choice decision. Recognizing my own experiences, observations, and context, I remained cognizant of how my acquisition of knowing would affect the research process (Creswell, 2014). The importance of understanding the context and subjective meanings allowed the study to analyze data through the

college choice model, the transition to college, and the adapted Astin's involvement model to assess the capital gains and experience at an urban community college. Qualitative narrative research methods can be effectively employed to improve our understanding of a highly qualified student attending a lower-tiered college and letting the data determine how that translates into a college experience (Straus & Corbin, 1990).

Site Selection

The community college selected was an urban community college in Oklahoma referred to as City College. It was chosen because it is representative of the three urban community colleges in Oklahoma and provides a plethora of options, both in the classroom and outside the classroom, with on-campus housing, athletics, and service-learning opportunities. As of 2020, the community college offers more than 60 associate degrees and 11 certifications. City College enrolls approximately 7,044 students. White, non-Hispanic students comprise 54% of all students, Black students 14.7%, and two or more races 11.3%. Campus life features residence life with 170 students living on campus; athletics including men and women's soccer, softball, baseball, and intramural sports; 35 active student organizations; and monthly campus events. 75% of full-time students receive financial aid.

City College provides free tuition for area residents and high school students, referenced in the study as Ticket to City. To qualify, the student must live in the technical district of the community college or attend a high school that is located in the technical district. The student must apply by the deadline of their senior year and start college the fall immediately following high school graduation. This type of aid is known as gap funding. City College requires the students to submit a FAFSA. Ticket to City then fills the financial gap for the students in the

technical district who have a tuition expense higher than the financial aid awarded. Approximately 370 area residents and high school graduates participate in the program each fall.

City College maintains a scholarship program that provides substantial support, known as President's Leadership Class (PLC). The students are assigned to a specific cohort with an assigned advisor. The students enroll in a course with the Executive Vice President, have access and conversations with the college President, participate in special events and gatherings to increase bonding, and have built in service-learning opportunities. The scholarship provides various levels of funding for books and fees. In addition, each recipient receives free tuition. The program is not based on merit alone. Selection includes submitting an application, an interview process, and leadership potential as evidenced by high school involvement, including extracurricular activities and service hours. There are 55 new students added to the President's Leadership Class each year. Five students who score above a 29 ACT are awarded a Regents' scholarship[4] along with the PLC scholarship. Many PLC recipients are heavily swayed to attend City College by the lure of free tuition, including a portion of books being paid for by the scholarship.

Recruitment

The recruitment and selection criteria was a three-step system to ensure integrity and credibility in the process. The steps consisted of gaining the list of qualified participants; removing any potential cross-contamination due to the relationship with the researcher; and, finally, evaluating variation in apparent campus involvement and connection. To gain the list of qualified participants, I made an official inquiry with the Associate Vice President (AVP) of

[4] The Regents' scholarship provides the selected students free tuition for two years at the community college and two years free tuition at a state university once the student transfers as long as they maintain the required GPA.

Academic Affairs. The AVP maintains the institutional data and provided the list of potentially qualified participants. The query included first-time full-time[5] college enrollment with a high school cumulative 3.0 GPA or higher as documented on the final high school transcript. The query provided first name, last name, high school attended, cell phone, and home phone. The query did not produce race identifiers that later is noted as a limitation to the study.

Once the query was produced the student's high school transcript was reviewed to evaluate final high school grade point average (GPA). If the student's final GPA was greater than a 3.0, meeting the GPA parameter established, then the student was included in the email solicitation (Appendix A). If the student's high school GPA did not meet the 3.0 GPA threshold, the student was excluded, and another student was randomly selected. My goal was to include nine initial participants who created a representative sampling of the current student population in regard to male to female population ratio, and to avoid overrepresentation of any one specific campus entity that has student support as part of the design and purpose of the programming. I was careful to avoid students who represented an anomaly of extraordinary campus involvement. The ACT composite score included in the inquiry was 24 or higher. The combination of these qualifications is consistent with the standards presented by the OSRHE to gain admissions to the two flagship universities in the state. This criterion corresponds to the student being deemed as undermatched due to college selection to attend a community college in contrast to attending a college with more stringent admission standards. The research query was requested through the office of Academic Affairs at City College.

The query received from the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs produced 137 potential students from the incoming class and applied the parameters for selection (Merriam,

[5] First-time full-time is a designation for graduation rate calculation. First-time full-time includes enrolling in 12 hours or more each semester, demonstrating the intent to be a full-time college student.

2009). The next step was excluding students who had a connection to the researcher. Every student I had personally recruited to attend City College was removed from the list as a potential participant. The students included on the query whom I knew on a first-name basis and had established a relationship with, were removed as options as well. Every student on the list whom I employed, taught, advised, or mentored was no longer considered as an option to participate, to ensure the utmost data integrity in the email solicitation. I wanted to be sure that no one would feel any pressure to participate due to our relationship or my position at City College when the email solicitation was sent out.

The next step to evaluating the potential participants was surface-level identification of involvement. I intentionally assessed the variation of campus involvement and made sure there was not an overrepresentation of any one group. I did not want the study to simply be an examination of community college experience from a particular subset of the population's vantage point. I wanted at least one participant represented who could provide unique perspectives of an athlete, PLC student, and campus resident, but not an exuberant representation from each group. For instance, athletes have a unique student experience with the support system of the team and coaches. Being a student athlete is a special designation that can create additional support. This support is coupled with the demands and stress of transitioning and making the adjustment to college. I included athletes, but I did not want their narrative to be the only example of transition or involvement, because there are so many factors to adjusting to college life and being a college athlete. I wanted the sample to include on-campus residents, as well as commuter students, noting the experiences can vary drastically. I was strategically ensuring the sample was not overrepresented by the PLC students, because the intent of the study was not to evaluate nor critique the program. Finally, I was aware of the potential power over the

students I was advising, mentoring, or teaching. As described, I excluded all the students who could be deemed as a potential conflict of interest because of any ties to the researcher.

After these factors were considered, the initial query was greatly reduced to establish the integrity of participants included in the recruitment email. The technique to beckon the study's participants was purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). I then took the list, noting the percentage of participants who were members of the President's Leadership Class (PLC), in order to ensure a cross-sectional sampling. I determined that fewer than half of the students in the sample were members of PLC at City College. When collecting data for the second set of interviews relating to student experience, it was critical to get a clear picture of the lived experience of the participants. It was extremely important to me that the involvement was diversified and not all members of the PLC program[6]. The study analyzed the college choice decision as well as the narratives of students who were highly qualified and attending an urban community college.

Once the pool of participants was narrowed, a recruitment email was sent to 30 students randomly selected after I had verified each one's status as a full-time college student enrolled in more than 12 hours during Fall 2018. As mentioned, the study was designed to focus on students who are full-time college students, with the understanding that students can fall below the threshold if the student drops classes prior to completion of the semester. Once the potential participants responded with interest in being included in the study, they were sent a short demographic profile survey. The survey questions pertained to the following: first-generation status, type of high school attended, ethnicity, employment, socio-economic status, size of household, size of high school, Oklahoma Promise recipient, scholarships received, on-campus housing, living in family home (Appendix B). Three potential participants responded to the email

[6] The PLC program affords students to have additional opportunities that the overall community college population does not have access to.

requests, scheduled an interview time, and then did not follow through with participation. Below is the chart of qualified participants who completed the demographic survey and the first data set interview. Only one participant did not continue from semester one to semester two. Samantha (Sam) left college and quit responding to emails, texts, and even began ghosting close friends. The demographics and attributes of the participants are charted below:

Figure 6: Participants

Name	Ethnicity	Household Income	Included College Choice Data Set	Included Student Experience Data Set	First-generation	College Athlete	Student Employment	Student Lives on Campus	Member of PLC
Sam	Hispanic	50,000-74,999	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Rayna	Native American	Less than 24,999	Y	Y	N	No	N	Y	N
Jayce	Caucasian	50,000-74,999	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
Paige	Caucasian	125,000-199,000	Y		N	Y	N	Y	N
Hannah	Caucasian	75,000-125,000	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
Bridger	Native American	50,000-74,999	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Mikey	Lebanese/White	75,000-125,000	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y
Kyle	Caucasian	125,000-199,000	Y	Y	N	N		N	N
Savannah	Native American	75,000-125,000	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y

Limitations

In hindsight, a significant limitation to the study was the lack of ethnic diversity in the sample and the focus of the study was not expanded to include literature or analysis from a racial lens. When I was requesting the query to be obtained, the parameters established were focused on qualifiers from high school performance of the highly qualified student. The query produced basic contact information and high school attended. The urban community college was recruiting from 70 of the 77 counties in the state, and I wanted the diversification to include type of high school and location. I was concerned that if there was an overrepresentation of a specific high school, it could change the community college choice information, because the participants could have similar experiences that would result in similar influences from the high school. Furthermore, the study focus was on particular pockets of literature, but did not include racial literature that would have expanded the scope of the research.

I evaluated the students who qualified, and I reviewed campus involvement to ensure a diversification in experiences. I was cognizant of including equal gender representation as current enrollment . However, I did not include race identifiers in the initial query. As a result, I sent the email solicitation with no knowledge of race. I did not obtain demographic information until the participant agreed to be interviewed. The lack of centering the study on race is a regretful limitation, as research shows there is an overrepresentation of marginalized populations funneled to the community college. The stories of racialized populations are important and would have added crucial data to the study. It would have also allowed another type of exploration of the narratives. A racial lens would have added rich data to the study.

The study focuses on college choice for a specific urban community college in Oklahoma. The research for this demographic may not be wholly applicable for states with

different structures of higher education or different scholarship opportunities for state residents. The campus experience component and involvement theory would be strengthened by a longitudinal case study following the students from community college to the university. Even greater ramifications would include if the study was extended beyond college, following the graduate's career path and career trajectory with a review of lived experience after beginning at an open-access college that was below the academic qualifications the student met. A realization occurred during the analysis process: Social capital gained from community college influences cannot be adequately measured or compared.

Data Collection

Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested that "qualitative interviews and ordinary conversations share much in common" (p. 12). As we converse in our daily interactions, we construct stories that describe our experiences and lives. We share and negotiate the construction with the people around us. Data was collected from two semi-structured, one-hour interviews. All participants were asked the same questions, however there was some finesse as the researcher approached, listened and responded appropriately, allowing the narratives to progress with a natural flow. The semi-structured interviews allow for some flexibility as the participants explore their individual experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The interview process in narrative research provides rich meaningful data that cannot be captured by any other research methods (Tierney & Haggedorn, 2002). As the participant and researcher become "conversational partners," the stories are told and the researcher records the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The process of retelling the lived experiences solidifies their personal narrative and helps assimilate the construction of meaning. Qualitative research is concerned with how people make sense of their lives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The participant

and researcher are working together simultaneously to create a "shared understanding" (p. 14).

The qualitative data for the study was collected through two interview stages. During the first set of interviews, I was employed as a community college student affairs professional at City College. Between the first interview, Fall 2018, and the subsequent interview, Spring 2019, I accepted a position at a four-year university and conducted the second set of interviews no longer employed at the community college where the participants were in attendance. The designated time frame for the collection of the first data set was the first semester of college. The set of questions utilized was exploring the process of college choice (Appendix C- College Choice Interview Protocol). The main focus of the first interview was to discuss the process and path that led to community college choice, including the decisions that prompted beginning college in an "undermatched" scenario. I asked each participant to reflect back to the moment they internalized and viewed themselves as college material. Most journeys start with a memory or a pivotal moment that sets in motion the path they will take. The students reflected back to the memories that cemented the belief that they would attend college. Some students had distinct recollections of the influences that led to becoming a college student. The students' narratives then explored the colleges that were being considered and the factors to those considerations. A thorough review ensued, relaying how each student ultimately decided to become a community college student. The narratives then explored the transition to college.

The second data set was conducted following the completion of the second semester. The intention of the framework was to include the participant regardless of enrollment status, completion status, or if the student decided to transfer to another institution or stop-out. As long as the student was available and willing to participate, they were included in the follow-up protocol. The second interview was focused examination on the student's experience as a highly

qualified community college student. The questions shifted from inquiring what influenced college choice to the actual community college lived experience (Appendix D-College Experience Interview Protocol). One participant decided to transfer to a university after one year at the community college, while another student left college and could not be contacted. The researcher wanted to include the stop-out data as well. I felt it was important to capture each story, completing the picture of not only the success, but also the trials, that can transpire from one semester to the next, in hopes of providing a robust picture of narratives. I was persistent in trying to reach this participant. My efforts were not successful. The inability to capture this story of struggle and what led to this decision was disappointing to me.

During the second data set collection, the participants were asked to share additional information relating to their college experience. Finally, the student participants paused to consider if they would recommend the same choice to a friend who was a highly qualified student, or if there were any regrets relating to being undermatched as a community college student. The design allowed for a full circle approach from first interview relating to college choice to the overall college experience thus far at an urban community college.

Data Analysis

The longitudinal data was collected over two consecutive semesters. As explained earlier, the first data set occurred in the first semester of college. The second data set of interviews was at the completion of the first year of college. Prior to the first interview, each participant submitted a digital biographical survey (Appendix B-Background Information Survey). As I conducted each interview, I jotted down notes and memos to record body language changes, voice inflections, and even emotions that were evident in facial expressions, that may be lost in transcription of the interviews. Pairing my comments and memos with the verbatim

transcriptions assisted in the more subjective side of data analysis. Reflecting after each interview and journaling impressions allowed me to maintain accurate accounts of the narratives during analysis. This enhanced my ability to be keenly aware of the relationship between participants and the setting of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). During the first set of interviews, I was employed by the research site. I carefully examined my feelings, perceptions, and motives.

Data analysis began with verbatim transcription of the interviews. The production of the transcript is referred to as "research activities." I embarked on a pragmatic approach of constant comparative analysis, aiming to answer the research questions through the lens that I am justly representing the narrative data set. There was a two-year time span between data collection of the first set of interviews and when data analysis transpired. The separation from my position at the college was a valued barrier to allow my analysis to be done with a renewed perspective and ability to look at data with a fresh set of eyes.

As I conducted repeated readings, themes unraveled from the interviews (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984). I utilized the constant comparative analysis of inspecting and conceptualizing the data fragments that emerged in each single case (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). This allowed me to search for patterns, themes, and discrepancies to understand cases individually before generating the start list. The constant comparative analysis generated a set of categories by expanding the data comparison (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Since the study is not grounded theory, the analysis was an adaptation of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) working toward establishing codes and themes for each set of interviews. O'Connor et al. (2008) stated: "Simply put, constant comparison assures that all data are systematically compared to all other data in the data set. This assures that all data produced will be analyzed rather than

potentially disregarded on thematic grounds" (p. 41). Approaching line by line, word by word, assisted in the analysis (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Constant comparative analysis as a method can be applied to narrative research as a system to code the interviews. "The review of the literature works to help develop frameworks and paradigms, which work as scaffolding for the researcher" (Fram, 2013, p. 4). The distinct triangulation of my experience and the review of the literature influenced the deductive codes. Beginning with a "start list" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 58), the initial work includes degree aspirations, high school influence, self-efficacy, goals, finances, and location. The iterative process established inductive coding (Appendix E). The researcher relied on a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis System (CAQDAS) known as Dedoose. Creswell (2007) noted that computer assisted analysis provides an organized storage system, allowing the research to sort, enhancing close reading of the data focusing on specific excerpts, resulting in establishing relationships between codes and themes. It is imperative for qualitative research to be credible. The coding practices created an in-depth analysis as I scoured the interviews. During the analysis process, the researcher searched for evidence bringing the voice and perspective of the research population to life (Salmona et al., 2020).

The process of community college choice was the launching point of the narratives, creating a more robust picture of what influenced the highly qualified students' decision to attend a community college. Silverman and Marvasti (2008) noted that "the coding exercise will help determine pieces of the puzzle while working back and forth through the transcript and see how the puzzle is ultimately formed through the themes that emerge" (p. 20). The interview data provides a variety of narration as the participants describe the world according to their own perspective (Holstein & Gubrien, 1995). According to Miller and Glassner (1997), the narratives

allow the participants an opportunity to make their own individual actions and experiences comprehensible and justifiable to those who may not understand their point of view and lived experience.

Dedoose assisted in the labeling and sifting through the narratives to draw out appropriate text. At times, the rich and meaningful data was flagged, and additional memos created due to the nature or connection to another piece of data. “When analytically filtering, the researcher needs to continue to dig for more meanings and not get distracted by a potential theory bit and disengage from further critical analysis” (Salmona et al., 2020, p.110). Dedoose allowed the researcher to flag, move on, and then bring all these areas together succinctly, without interrupting the flow or process of the analysis. Leech and Onwuegbuzie’s (2019) viewpoint of using a tool for sorting relays “[these] programs can help researchers to analyze their data, but they cannot analyze the data for researchers” (p. 578). I spent hours and days sifting through the excerpts to move from the broad open code to the more narrow axial codes that would adequately represent the narratives. The work produced analysis of 615 excerpts, 41 codes, with 1286 code applications.

According to Creswell and Miller (2000), triangulation is a method for looking at data in different ways or from different points of view. I accomplished triangulation through sequential data analysis. After reading through each transcript and considering initial analysis, I applied the following initial codes through inductive constant comparative analysis. This exercise generated the start list consisting of five open coding categories: degree aspirations, high school influence, self-efficacy, goals, finances, and location. The next step was reading through all the findings with the code applications applied. I constantly compared data cycling in and out of data generation and analysis, revisiting interview data and memos: “What’s happening here?”

(Charmaz, 2008, p. 161). Careful consideration was made. As a result, the open code list was edited, generating the axial codes. The constant comparative method yielded results from the perspective of the individual participant. Five themes emerged from the first data set, demonstrating accurate broad descriptors contributing to community college choice of a highly qualified student. Dedoose enhanced data analysis and interpretation at a deeper level and involved narrower coding categories in order to access a comparable level of specificity. I sorted the 321 codes from the open list, moving toward axial coding. This allowed me to siphon the data down toward more specific levels and hone into the excerpts to derive meaning into narrow connected categories. The second data set encompassed 332 excerpts. The repeated readings enhanced the emergence of the axial codes. This allowed me to effectively collapse codes into themes and themes into categories (Saldaña, 2015). I identified areas that needed to be narrowed and codes that needed to be added. I divided the two data sets into the first set of interviews relating to college choice, and the second set of interviews relating to the community college experience. The coding expansion and narrowing was as follows:

Figure 7: DATA SET 1 Community College Choice

Open Code	Axial Code	Excerpts
High School Influence		**115**
	Administration	57
	Family	49
	Peers	14
Pre- College Self-Efficacy		**32**
Degree Aspirations		**46**
	Business	1
	Cyber Security	13
	STEM	16
	Undecided	4
College Choices		**94**
	Campus Tour	1
	Decision between cc or university	36

	Finances	76
	Location	21
	Opportunities	12
	Reputation	11
Social and Cultural Reproduction		**34**

As mentioned during the "research activities," the start list of open codes began with degree aspirations, high school influences, self-efficacy, finances, and location. The high school influence for college choice from the literature and interviews was simple to add axial codes relating to influences of choice with the high school administration, family influence, and peers. Self-efficacy prior to college remained an open code because it was the predisposition of college-going behaviors and recognizing what time that started for each participant. Research pointed out that many community college students are not deciding which college, only which major. Therefore, I added college major and honed in on majors that applied to the majority of the participants. College choices were added to the list as I ascertained that most participants were having two things occur simultaneously during college choice: They were eliminating one college while accepting the community college. Those decisions were influenced by the axial codes established, such as the following: campus tour, decision between a university or the community college, finances, location, opportunities provided at the community college, and the reputation of the community college for employment following degree completion or the reputation for transferability. Social and cultural reproduction was added later, as I began to see threads of excerpts taking advantage of the system and the number of participants that were replicating their parents' or siblings' experiences as community college student alumni. These activities allowed me to analyze the data in a focused manner and determine the themes repeated by the highly qualified student.

Figure 9: Data Set 2 Community College Experience

Open Code	Axial Code	Excerpts
Campus Involvement		**83**
	Athletics	6
	Campus Employment	9
	Campus Housing	13
	PLC	21
	Student Organization	17
Transition Liability		**58**
Transition Assets		**56**
	Concurrent	1
Output		**88**
	Capital	23
	Connection	46
	Engagement in Education	82
	Mentors	38
Campus Attributes Enhancing Engagement		**47**
	Accessibility of Professor	22
	Desired Major	5
	Location	2
	Campus Housing	1
	Class Size	12
	Staff and resource accessibility	10

The start list did not encompass the second data set to the same degree as the first set of interviews. Delineating the different types of campus involvement represented was important to the researcher. There was intent with the initial email solicitation seeking to vary campus participation, ensuring the research did not have an overrepresentation of one area of campus involvement. Transition assets and liabilities were included to see how the students progressed from semester one and two with the assets and liabilities that were specific to their story. This also enhanced the analysis of reflection and looking for the occurrences in the research. Utilizing the adapted Astin's model, I added output as an open code, with the axial codes being capital,

connection, engagement in education, and mentors. Finally, the narratives produced messages echoing why the community college choice was benefiting the student. The open code was campus attributes, with the axial codes of accessibility of professors, desired major, campus location, campus housing, class size, and staff and resource accessibility. The process working through the data was extremely beneficial when producing the findings.

Several codes came to the surface that were not anticipated by the researcher. Community college choice led to findings that included the "sibling effect." The second data set encompassed campus connections that demonstrated the impact of community college professors. Also, peer influences became prevalent throughout many of the narratives. This process allowed these codes to emerge due to recognizable recurrences of the participants reiterating the impact on college choice and campus connection. After all the sifting and reflection of the data, I determined whether the narratives demonstrated a clear theme that was surfacing and needed to be included in the findings.

When approaching the messy process of findings, selective coding occurred, connecting the process from open coding to axial coding. This allowed for some themes to be elevated in importance to the research. Through the extensive analysis exercises and the assistance from the Dedoose tools, the findings were derived, adding to the community college research. The findings are divided into two chapters. The first chapter consists of the narratives of the community college choice as a highly qualified student. The second chapter echoes the opportunities of involvement and how that impacted first-year experience.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: COLLEGE CHOICE

In this chapter, I will discuss the five themes in the data that framed the road map for community college choice by the highly qualified participants. The narratives review the individual process of community college choice, recognizing the development of self-efficacy as a future college goer. As the individual establishes beliefs regarding college attendance paired with decisions of college choices, the influences of family and high school administrators are pronounced, including the belief that it is acceptable to start at a community college. The findings also include how the students approached the financial implications of college costs and the location of the college in relationship to the distance from home and whether the participants would be commuters or choose to live on campus.

Self-Efficacy

According to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy is the belief and confidence that the individual belongs in a setting or possesses the ability to succeed. A person must internalize and believe themselves to be college material before they can position themselves to have the courage and determination to jump the hoops to begin college. For many, the belief that a person belongs in college starts in the household at a very young age. The household can plant the seed, and directly or indirectly, echo “you are college material.” Examples of indirect influence of college expectations can begin as early as infancy as the child is clothed and photographed with a university onesie. Cheering for a football team and purchasing the coordinating jersey or cheer outfit are indirect messages regarding college. The direct messages come from approaching the questions of “What will you be when you grow up?” Starting points for the belief “I am college material” can be as simple as strolls through college campuses, pointing out the college

campuses as the family passes them on outings or vacations, and discussing what majors are offered, or the impression of what types of students attend particular colleges or universities.

Family members can recognize a child's interest and begin reinforcing certain fields of study. For instance, Kyle liked planes. He lived less than 7 miles from an air force base and his uncle was an aerospace engineer. As a young boy, his academic interests focused on STEM fields that related to planes, because this was reinforced by his family. This brings up the question of whether or not Kyle would have aspired towards aeronautics had he not grown up in a family environment that encouraged the interest, and one that he was willing to mimic as an identifying way to increase acceptance in the family. Kyle also realized that his education would be supported and encouraged more by his family if he studied within the field of STEM. His family environment was the first and primary factor in his early visions of higher education. The family lived within ten minutes of the local community college. A child's exposure to college, conversations surrounding those early influences relating back to the family habitus, and the history and personal interactions surrounding college attendance are reinforcing messages. Furthermore, when someone is the first to attend college in the family, a disparity in knowledge exists (Choy, 2001). For first-generation students, the reliance on formalized education, community, and peers creates a stream of influence on the movement toward forming college self-efficacy.

Common education setting and where a person attends school also impacts the reinforcement of potential careers and college options. Savannah attended a rural high school. The community's most notable industry is a lone car dealership. Savannah had family members who had careers in medicine. She felt some limitations, being a bright female, and landed on the conclusion of *"*If I want to be in medicine, I should be a nurse." Savannah knew she was college

material. She had limited knowledge of the countless number of majors that were available for women in STEM-related fields. Her mother had attended a community college and it was reinforced as an acceptable launching point toward a nursing career.

In contrast, Mikey attended an urban high school that is highly diverse in race, ethnicity, and socio-economic class. 74 percent of the students enrolled in Mikey's high school are living beneath poverty level. The high school is located a few miles from the local community college. At Mikey's high school, many of the faculty and staff members emphasize the importance of college because historically, there are some students who lack that emphasis in the home. Mikey recalled learning about City College as early as 5th grade. Then he recalled specific information in 7th grade explaining the Ticket to City[7] program with a golden ticket novelty item. Mikey had high college-going self-efficacy and had no doubt he would attend college one day. He reflected positively on how he viewed City College even as young as ten years old. Mikey was aware that City College is an open-admissions college, but he never felt that the choice was beneath him. The option to attend City College with free tuition was revered as positive. Mikey also was aware that he could be a part of the President's Leadership Class, and not only get a larger dollar amount that would cover books and fees, but that by being in PLC, he could open doors to going to a bigger, more prestigious college for the last two years of his undergraduate degree. Mikey knew that if he could excel in high school by taking AP courses, he could be a better contender for scholarships and college admissions. Mikey spoke affectionately about the additional support of his high school counselor. He talked about how Ms. Ahmad would stay on him, saying, "Mikey, better be thinking about college." This support continually reinforced Mikey's belief that college was the next step for him. The students who have reinforced messages strive to play

[7] The Ticket to City program guarantees free tuition to City College for up to 64 hours (or 2 years, whichever comes first) for any high school graduate from the surrounding 5 counties of City College.

the game to get the advantage, and they are doing so under the direction of the high school administrator, whether that be a teacher as an advisor or a high school counselor.

From the family home to the impressionable years of grade school and middle school, self-efficacy is reinforced and the belief in college as a part of the future is substantiated: "One day, I will go to college." Once the student is in high school, the courses selected reinforce the commitment and determination to be a college-bound student. AP courses are highly regarded as college-bound curriculum. The counselors and teachers make it clear that this is the curriculum and rigor that will prepare a student for college. "College knowledge, and the development of a college-going identity, can enhance the relevance of the high school experience, help youth stay engaged in school, and ensure they take the necessary steps to prepare for and enroll in postsecondary education" (Hooker & Brand, 2012, p. 77). Savannah knew the impressions of students who took advantage of the AP courses. Savannah explains that when you do all the things the counselors ask and take the right courses, the administration categorizes *"*you …as a leader…as a college goer.*"* If the adults in your life see college as part of your future, it is reinforced consistently by messages and opportunities shared at a greater frequency. Savannah recalls being instructed and pushed to take AP courses to get ready for college. The courses are designed with more rigor. The AP course outcome "expects students to obtain a high level of competency and interest in the subject matter and thus be prepared for the rigors of college-level work[8]" (Long et al., 2019, p. 3). Once a student completes the AP course, they can pay for the

[8] High schools have accepted theories "that the existing courses that students would otherwise take do not offer the level of rigor, inquiry, or direct connection to postsecondary education that the AP course offers. Depending upon school offerings, students who seek demanding instruction have three other options. Most high schools offer honors courses, which are intended to provide more rigor than a regular high school course, but not necessarily at a college level. Some students can also enroll in dual enrollment or dual credit courses, which are taught by college instructors often at a nearby college or online" (Long, et al., 2019, p. 3)..This results in funneling students toward AP courses to as a means to college preparation.

AP exam to potentially earn college credit. High school counselors reinforce enrollment in these courses for all college-bound students not only for the potential college credit, but for the rigor. The courses are taught on a level that students should have to study to earn a letter grade of an A. High schools weight the GPA higher for these courses as another incentive to enroll in the courses. College credit is not guaranteed. The performance on AP exams can vary according to a multitude of factors, including high school teacher's ability to teach the subject at college level and adequately prepare students for the types of questions the exam requires. Some students gain value from the learning, but simply do not perform on the tests. Savannah scored a 31 ACT (top 3% nationally), but did not achieve passing scores on AP exams to receive college credit. Even though Savannah's AP test scores were not high enough to earn college credit, she conveyed that the courses made her feel more equipped to approach college courses, and she felt confident that she was academically prepared to go to college.

College-bound students are also urged to build a resume as a way to have the advantage when seeking scholarships in the college-going game through service, extracurricular activities, and other opportunities outside the classroom that will make them stand out for scholarship applications. Rayna, from a very small rural high school, became involved with creating elaborate Science Fair projects and working with them in correspondence with a mentor from the Environmental Protection Agency. This exposure to competing in international science fairs and having a water engineer mentor increased her self-efficacy as well as impacting her potential major. Academic and career development studies have found that the relationship between self-efficacy and goals was vital to post-secondary attendance (Flores et al., 2008).

From the exposure provided in the family home to school, regardless of where the idea is birthed, self-efficacy regarding college plants the seed and solidifies the belief that "I belong."

The seed grows as the students have additional experiences and reinforcements to view themselves as college-bound students. The compilation of all college messages determines how the student interacts and prepares as a future college-bound student.

Family Influence

College choice is greatly impacted by the influence of family. The experiences and perceptions a family maintains impact college choice decisions. A sibling's experiences, including both successes and failures, also impact the decision of younger siblings. Family influence was prevalent throughout the narratives of the highly qualified student attending a community college.

Kyle's mother is a teacher, and his family was extremely devoted to college messaging. They allowed, encouraged, and supported him to attend a residential high school with students who possessed the same aptitude as Kyle. He reflects on his parents' positioning on going to college: His mother being a teacher and his father an engineer made it clear he was going to college. Kyle felt he came from an affluent home, where degrees in math and science were important. Kyle's family wanted to ensure he was exposed to the greatest college preparatory program that was possible. Parents with the cultural capital strive to give their children a college culture advantage. Cultural capital is the accumulation of types of experiences and knowledge that are associated with high society, such as museums, art exhibits, travel, and educational opportunities (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). High cultural capital is evident in this home as the parents wanted special opportunities provided for Kyle that were not available in his assigned school district. Kyle's parents chose to remove him from the environment and influences in his school district to immerse him in a population with the greatest opportunities. Kyle attended a residential college preparatory high school that is known for its extreme rigor,

college placement success, and high school faculty with doctorate-level credentials. By nature, Kyle's self-efficacy toward becoming a college goer was firmly established by being admitted to a prestigious residential high school that is known for producing the most Ivy-league eligible students in the state. Kyle's parents wanted him to have the competitive advantage above his peers in his community. The high school is known for having no extra-curricular activities available, because all of the students' time is relegated to exposure to college-level academic curriculum. With this in mind, as Kyle approached attending a community college after two years of a residential high school, Kyle's parents were not sold on the community college as the right fit for Kyle. They had expected Kyle to enroll at a state university. Kyle made his final decision based on the cost effectiveness of the community college. He did decide to transfer after a year, to be sure he would not lose any credits during the transfer process.

In many households, the mother sets the tone for college going and the importance of education. Research shows a correlation between high school performance and maternal degree attainment (Augustine, 2017). Bridger reflected on the influence of his mother as he entered middle school and approached college readiness. Bridger talked about how much his mom spoke about the permanency of a high school transcript. She would remind Bridger, the transcript stays with you throughout the years and during the college admittance stage. Then Bridger recalled, as he approached his junior year, he started intently investigating the various college choices. By the start of his senior year, Bridger had narrowed in on his college choice to be an urban community college because of the degree program offered and the affordability.

In this same vein, Savannah's mother also encouraged her to attend City College, where she was an alumna. Savannah discussed how many of her friends who were a grade older started at State University and were overwhelmed by the number of people in their classes. Savannah's

mother explained that when she went to City College, it was more personable, with a lower faculty-to-student ratio. Savannah knew about the scholarship potential at City College as a Regents' scholar[9] and her mom reinforced that City College was a great place to start.

Parents have been noted as key influences in the predisposition phase of college choice (Hossler et al., 1989). However, the research also indicates that as the students develop and enter the search phase of college choice, outside influences play crucial role. The research indicates that parents are replaced by peers, teachers, and counselors (Hossler et al., 1999). However, this study shows that family members, including mothers and siblings, exerted themselves and continued to play a strong role of influence in these participants' lives and college choices. Paige discussed how her entire family had input and reflected on how her sister started at a community college as well. Paige spoke passionately of how invaluable her family's insight into college choice was during the process. Paige having a sister who had begun college at a community college became a crucial influence as Paige approached college choice. Her sister's decision to start at a community college solidified the decision, resulting in her family agreeing that the community college was a good place for her to start higher education. A Harvard study conducted by Goodman et al. (2014) demonstrates the sibling effect whereas:

> Younger and older siblings' choices are very closely related. One-fifth of younger siblings enroll in the same college as their older siblings. The quality of college selected by an older sibling is strongly predictive of the quality chosen by a younger sibling. These findings vary little by family income, race or proximity to four-year colleges

[9] The Regents' Scholarship is a scholarship that provides two years of tuition, fees, and book monies for four semesters. The scholarship transfers with the student to the State University for free tuition and fees as well a book stipend. The scholarship is provided by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. Community Colleges are awarded four scholarships per year to award incoming first-year students with an ACT above a 29.

(p. 13).

The study demonstrates how the sibling effect is pronounced, impacting 20% of the households with children who are the next in line to approach college choice decisions. As Mikey explained, his entire life his siblings have been in and out of college. He has watched them. He has listened to them talk. Mikey internalized his parents' perspective on decisions and occurrences of the siblings. By the time it came to Mikey, his family had adopted the point of view that beginning at a community college is the only sound decision: "Everything about it makes sense."

To have siblings who navigated higher education before the study's participants created a strong knowledge base, whether it was to direct them toward a community college, or to act as a protective agent, saying, "Do not make the same mistakes I made." The wealth of knowledge of having someone else go before you, whether that be a parent or a sibling, vastly impacted the narratives. Jayce talked about his mother regarding college choice. Jayce felt that he had a double dose of influence. His sister had also been a City College student and college athlete. The age difference was seven years. Therefore, he did not remember many details about City College. The community college was held in high regard in his home, and he did not have any recollection of any negative talk or any red flags regarding his sister's experience as a City College student athlete.

The researcher recognizes that in the cases of Mikey, Rayna, and Bridger, the siblings were close enough in age for the student to be cognizant of what was going on with a sibling in relation to college, noting that the timeframe was within five years of them starting college themselves. The sibling effect acknowledges it is common to value the older siblings' information about the college application process, information about the experience of attending a particular college, or physical proximity on campus. "All of these possibilities suggest a causal

influence of the older sibling's college choices" (Goodman et al., 2014, p. 15). Mikey's brother started at a large university, and swirled around a bit to find his path; as a result, Mikey had a deep impression of his brother's standpoint and reasoning behind starting at a community college.

> But one of my brothers basically thinks that everyone should go to community college first. And I tend to agree with that. Everyone has an opportunity, don't go and waste all this money at universities. I tend to think that people get hurt in the end, and normally people don't know exactly what they want right out of college and better to mess up and fumble dealing with lower thousands and not upper thousands.

Rayna spoke candidly that she was following in her brother's footsteps, and his decisions greatly impacted her community college choice. Rayna's brother influenced not only where to attend, but also what courses to enroll in to ensure that she stayed on the best degree path for transferability to become an engineer. Bridger watched his sister at State School while he was approaching the stages of college choice. He had different degree plans, but noticed the surmounting costs, and felt an obligation to not create additional financial burdens on his family in regard to college expenditures. Bridger's sister is pursuing a terminal degree as a veterinarian and he felt an obligation not to add an additional cost burden to his parent.

Throughout a large portion of the college choice narratives, family members were significant contributors to college choice. The family is a notable influence to college choice and for students to consider a community college. It is difficult to determine whether it is the sibling effect or simply the absorption of inter-family preferences. "It may be that siblings simply have the same preferences for factors such as college quality and distance from home that result from a shared environment" (Goodman et al., 2014, p. 13). For the participants, they each expressed

self-efficacy, believing they were college material and preparing for future college enrollment. Eventually, the choice phase became granularized to the connection and belief that community college was an acceptable option. In some instances, the students even had parents or siblings who had history with City College. In the narratives, choosing a community college was not only a reasonable choice, but was believed to be a natural college fit.

High School Administration

In the four years of high school, students spend approximately 3,600 hours with school administration and peers. The high school is influential in future college and career planning. From teachers, coaches, and college guidance counselors, the themes of going to college are echoed in different ways through the respective hallways at each high school. The information is distributed in different ways through different lenses. Each high school has its own individual flavor of delivery and weight of importance to the students and community to which it delivers education information. The high school a student attends and the administrators they encounter are crucial vehicles to establish college-going culture. Hooker and Brand (2010) note:

> Far too many students do not receive counseling on the range of postsecondary options or on finding a course of study that matches their interests and career aspirations. Without such guidance, they cannot make informed choices based on the opportunities and labor market prospects available in their communities (p. 77).

The experience, encouragement, and college going messaging is greatly influenced by the high school attended and the administration the student encounters. For these purposes, administration is any school personnel of authority and influence, including teachers, principals, coaches, and high school counselors.

High school administrators' influence is not confined to specific roles. Any administrator

the student feels is rooting for them, shows genuine care about their well-being, and who is invested in their future, can be a source of influence. Research shows that effective teachers can be as influential as guidance counselors. Myrick et al. (1990) notes that characteristics to allow an administrator to connect with the student include (p.15):

See the student's point of view.

Personalize the education experience.

Facilitate a class discussion where students listen and share ideas.

Develop a helping relationship with students and parents.

Organize personal learning experiences.

Be flexible.

Be open to trying new ideas.

Model interpersonal and communication skills.

Foster a positive teaming environment.

Good guidance and good teaching are closely related in terms of a helping relationship. The narratives demonstrated how different high school personnel influenced college-going culture, whether it was the expected role of high school guidance counselor, teacher as advisor, classroom teacher, coach, or even the principal. “The Consortium on Chicago School Research found that attending a high school with a strong college-going culture was the most consistent predictor of whether students took the steps required for college enrollment” (Hooker & Brand, 2010, p. 7). The participants related to and gained college ideations from different areas of influence depending on who they felt was invested in their future.

Jayce talked with a positive affect of how his high school counselor started a focus group to support students in the LGBTQia community. The counselor provided a safe space for

students in a rural setting to discuss their sexual identity, and she gave up her lunchtime to create a group setting. Jayce knew the counselor was highly invested in him. Interestingly enough, this particular counselor was pro a particular state flagship school, but when it came to guiding Jayce, she put those ties aside and talked to him about scholarship potential, as well as the small environment and support City College is known to provide. The shift in her approach shows a devotion to listen and consider what may be the best environment for the student even if bias exists because of personal experience. Provided in the emerging theme of self-efficacy, Mikey spoke about Ms. Ahmad, high school counselor, who sought him out and continuously made sure he was in the know about college preparations. People outside of the school district may make assumptions that if you go to a certain high school, then your access to college materials will all be the same. However, I think it is important to point out that Mikey was aligned with Ms. Ahmad because of his last name. Urban high schools with large class size divide the class up in different ways to help reduce caseload. Therefore, one high school student may be paired with a "go-getter" counselor as Mikey described, while another student in the same district may be assigned to a lackluster counselor who does not reach the students the same way that Mikey experienced with Ms. Ahmad. All high school experiences should be equitable, but they are not, for a myriad of reasons. Research suggests that college readiness in urban high schools can accentuate the disparity, resulting in a lack of college knowledge by marginalized populations, including the lowest wage earners and those from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Roderick et al., 2009).

Teachers as Advisors is a way to create a lift for high school counselors who have student ratio assignments from 1:200 in rural settings to 1:500 at urban high schools. The funding of the high school also depends on the ratio of student load distribution. Teachers as advisors was

implemented with the belief that growth and connection can be increased when one person has complete ownership of a small group of students. Teacher as Advisors by design assigns teachers to a group of advisees as additional sources of disseminating college going material. Jayce described his teacher as advisor experience with Ms. Henry as one that provided a plethora of college information, and he felt that going to college was just a huge part of her life story. "I think it was part of her…She was a first-generation college student. She was like, education is the way to go." Ms. Henry's passion was evident. She invested in her students, and they paid attention to the wisdom she shared about future plans. Ms. Henry spoke about going to college and all the choices that were available. There was no bias, just lots of options, from Ivy league options, public and private universities, community colleges, and trade schools. Teachers help support the college-going climate.

Mikey described how devoted his Student Council sponsor and Leadership teacher, Kristy Cooper, was in providing options for college choice. She also taught them how to complete scholarship applications as part of her class. Ms. Cooper reinforced the things the counselor said and made sure that all of her students knew the options. She brought in speakers to the class to teach the students how to write a college essay, how to dress for a leadership interview, how to present yourself, and how to put together a college resume. Ms. Cooper was highly influential as she worked toward encouraging and pushing each student toward a path that would help her students know their future options. She was open about the local community college being an option, but did not limit any of her students' interest, because she believed that college fit was important for the individual. Teachers and sponsors for high school organizations help reinforce the value in continuing education pursuits after high school.

Another influence in high schools is coaches. Paige described her soccer coach's influence as she reflected back to her junior year of high school and how the coach encouraged her to pursue her dreams of becoming a college athlete. Paige's coach was friends with City College's soccer coach. As a result, she would take the varsity team members who wanted to be college athletes out to practice with the City College women's soccer team. This opportunity gave the student athletes a firsthand, up-close preview of what City College's women's soccer coach was like, but it also influenced Paige to consider City College. Paige had a trusting relationship with her high school soccer coach. Paige thought, if my coach believed in the program at City College, it was worth coming back for a campus tour with my mom.

Providing opportunities of self-discovery of what a college campus is like is another way administrators' influence college choice. While there are many families that prioritize college education and reflect the same kind of proactivity that Kyle experienced with going to a residential college preparatory high school, research shows that not all homes have the same emphasis or messaging. Each high school student approaching college choice is individualized to the parents' personal preference, level of comfort, and knowledge about options. As a result, federal grants have attempted to offset the gaps by offering federal support for specific programming that allows access to resources and college campus visits. The federal educational grant program known as Gear UP[10] (Gaining Early Awareness & Readiness in Undergraduate Programs) puts this practice of targeting seventh graders into action, so the educational face of a community can be changed. Students learn about money management and the various levels of

[10] The state Gear UP program selects communities where at least 80% of the population does not go on to any higher education after high school. While there are smaller Gear UP grants that are written with a more narrow focuses for specific colleges and universities, the state Gear UP grant focuses on rural communities. The strategy is to target seventh graders who begin to be indoctrinated in college-going language, such as scholarship, ACT, SAT, transcripts, leadership, financial aid, FAFSA, and retention.

higher education, with an emphasis on the community college as both a viable and a financially attainable option. Three of the nine participants attended the rural schools that participate in the state Gear UP initiative. This provided access to STEM camps, annual college visits, and free ACT tests taken in the last two years of high school. “Effective programs also provide early college exposure by conducting campus visits, hosting programs on college campuses, and providing opportunities for high school students to earn college credits” (Hooker & Brand, 2010, p. 78).

Gear UP[11] was a strong source of disseminating information about the camps and creating resumes’ that demonstrated commitment to academic and co-curricular involvement. The statewide Gear UP grant was part of an experiment called the Liaison Experiment, which assigned a person who worked at a participating college or university, while also immersing them into the Gear UP middle schools and high schools. For the 7-year period of the grant, City College had a College Liaison who was assigned to Bridger’s high school, and developed a relationship with the students, funneling their areas of interest into degree plans, majors, activities, and events at City College. The Gear UP liaison recommended Bridger for the City College cybersecurity camp, which he attended. The camp gave Bridger a feel for the environment at City College. He recognized how accessible faculty and staff were to make inquiries, work through projects, and have “real” talk about how the industry works and how to become employed. The camp laid a foundation of what career options are available for individuals who receive an associate degree in cybersecurity. The camp also provided

[11] “This discretionary grant program is designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. GEAR UP provides six-year or seven-year grants to states and partnerships to provide services at high-poverty middle and high schools. GEAR UP grantees serve an entire cohort of students beginning no later than the seventh grade and follow the cohort through high school. GEAR UP funds are also used to provide college scholarships to low-income students" (GearUP index, 2020).

information about the cybersecurity career paths after completing an associate degree, including how to become employed at the local Air Force base while continuing education toward an online bachelor's at a state university. Bridger stated that this opportunity to be on the campus and learn more about cybersecurity fueled his decision to be a cybersecurity major and made him more aware of the options at the community college. From the research, the influences are not stand-alone; they are an accumulation of influences in the student's life. In Bridger's narrative, his mother is the most influential character, but the cast of extras that play a supporting role are his sister and the Gear UP Liaison, both of whom reinforced Bridger's college exploration journey.

Samantha described another avenue of how she obtained information about City College and how the exposure piqued her interest. Samantha's choir teacher brought a faculty member from City College to visit her high school, and it made her want to tour the campus. Dr. Boothby of City College brought her Chamber Choir to perform for Samantha's class. Samantha was impressed. *"*They were very good, and they made a lot of us, you know, think wow, like, they've got something, like going on over here." From the visit, Samantha decided to schedule a tour of City College. Her high school was located 45 minutes from City College, but Samantha was concurrently enrolled at City College through ITV delivery. The combination of already earning college credits from City College and the choir performance made Samantha approach a campus tour with eyes wide open. Samantha's response from the tour, "And I loved everything about it, everything about it. I was like, oh my gosh, this is awesome, it's just what I want, you know."

Two participants reflected on the college-related materials the high school provided. Both were very introspective and did not feel that the top 10% of students received more information or more push toward college-going literature. However, they both felt that the way the

individuals interpreted the information and what they took away from the materials varied greatly because of their own construction of meaning. As a constructivist, I find that your schema builds as you receive additional messaging. An individual receives the information when they are developmentally prepared to sift through and make an informed decision. For each participant, the process is different, and the influences are individualized, depending on high school personnel, mentors, exposure to a variety of options, peers, and family influences and experiences. This brings the research full circle between the foundation of family influence intersecting with the high school administration influence. Mikey recapped how high school students interpreted the college preparatory messaging differently depending on their experiences and influences:

> It was a mystery and they didn't really know what it was and how it really worked. I think that was the main difference between my experience with college and what I thought of it too. So we all received the same information, but how I interpreted it was different than how others interpreted it, you know. Some were really into bigger colleges because they wanted to leave home and they wanted to get out of there, but my family thought community college was the way to go, you know. So, it was an easy choice for me.

In conclusion, the high schools put an emphasis on college-going awareness. As Mikey points out, what a student does with it and how the student receives the information comes back to the balance between self-efficacy that has established “I belong in college,” and the family influence regarding career options and college choice.

Finances

One of the fundamental questions of the study is why do highly qualified students attend a community college? The cost of college attendance was voiced repeatedly. Community colleges offer an affordable alternative college option that lacks the sticker price of the elite higher education options . The participants had concern for parents needing to finance the cost of college and grave fear of the accumulation of unnecessary debt. The participants echoed that the cost of the community college is a financially sound decision. College choice was weighed from a cost perspective and mindset. All nine participants mentioned the value of the community college. Six of the nine mentioned finances and college expenses repeatedly, stating that the cost and opportunities for scholarships were a substantial factor in the decision to start at a community college. College cost, especially for low-income students, is an immense component in making a college choice decision (Hurwitz, 2012). From concerns of out-of-state tuition, to determining if attending a University was worth the cost to the individual student, the perception of starting at a university was viewed as financially burdensome. Kyle, who attended a residential college preparatory high school, felt the State University scholarship for first-year students was so minuscule that he was concerned about the debt he would incur with starting out getting basic courses completed when City College provided the same courses. Mikey applied at the State University and worked the scholarship angle just to ascertain the final cost. He laughed when he realized he was not getting any scholarship dollars even though he had exceptional grades and solid test scores.

Jayce felt like the financial burden associated with the university was not worth it to him, and he mulled over decisions. Hannah wanted to go out of state and play soccer, but she described that as soon as she saw the price tag for out-of-state tuition, she tucked that desire away. Bridger thought about the land grant research university, but concluded, “There's no

reason not to attend City College.*"* It had the same courses at a fraction of the cost. Bridger expressed how English composition and calculus have the same texts and course material regardless whether you are at a state university or at a community college. However, the cost at City College is much less.

Bridger had zeroed in on his major as cybersecurity and looked at each higher education institution that offered that major. In the state, there is private university that maintains a reputable cybersecurity bachelor's program. Bridger explained the chances of him justifying the price tag would be the same likelihood of him winning the lottery. It just was not within reach for his family or what he believed made sense for his future. In addition, Bridger was not certain he would move straight from an associate to a bachelor's degree. He felt he could go to work and start earning a good salary and then decide if he wanted to pursue a bachelor's. When choosing a major in cybersecurity, research suggests a trend of technology jobs are allowing substantial pay without the need to continue on to a university (Calcagno et al.,2007). Bridger is the only participant in the study who was considering joining the workforce before completing a bachelor's degree.

Two of the research participants qualified for Ticket to City. Interestingly, Kyle, the participant who attended the prestigious, residential high school, qualified as a resident of the technical district. He did not have someone at the high school urging him to complete the simple application for Ticket to City, like the peers from his neighborhood. As a result, he missed the opportunity for free tuition and fees. He still started at the community college. Mikey was a graduate from the urban public school who described Ticket to City as being a great opportunity. The requirements are minimal, with a very simple and short application that must be completed before a student graduates from high school. The student must enroll full-time as a first-year

student. Mikey did not feel that taking advantage of this opportunity would lessen his education, but it did reduce the cost of the first two years. He knew he would continue, and at that time need to pay the price tag after transferring to a bachelor-granting institution. Mikey stated

> …And on top of that I plan on transferring to a different university and getting a bachelor's degree. So, I don't think the two years of City College has any negative effects at all. I think it's fantastic.

The researcher notes a few exceptions to the talk of higher education cost among three participants. There appeared to be a class discrepancy between the concerns about financing college education. In socio-economic class framework, the differences between money talk were most prevalent amongst the working class and the concern for cost and debt when approaching college choice. As we approach the second quarter of the 21st century, our nation's economic vitality, talent pipeline, and civic prosperity are at risk. The "what's best for me and mine" mindset, the growing divide between the "haves" and "have-nots"(Kanter, 2004, p. 7) are factors. The participants who mentioned finances the very least were the three outliers. The student with a household income of less than $24,999 only mentioned the cost of attendance one time. When a family income is below the poverty line then opportunities for pay for college are increased with federal monies to help defray the cost as well as state scholarships. The two students with household incomes above $150,000 a year only mentioned finances for a combined total of four times. For all other participants, cost and financial concern was noted more than six times by each remaining participant. Community college choice for the highly qualified student was often paired with finances for six of the nine participants. The highly qualified students possessed the family and education capital to negotiate their higher education choice through the vein of finances. When community college choice is correlated with finances, it creates what is noted by

Goldthorpe this is an example of social reproduction that is "doubly guaranteed by transmission of family's capital to children and by passive role of an educational system that does not enable social transformation" (p. 11). The family concern about finances and debt acquisition was clearly passed on from parents, and the participants discussed community college choice as it directly related to college expenses.

Location

Within in my data, I recognized that the location of City College was an important factor to the majority of participants. Interestingly, some of the importance of the location is based on the proximity of the family home from which the participant could commute, while others who were living on campus were moving from the family home but wanted the distance to be within reason in order to travel home each weekend. For two participants, the importance of location was based on the lack of transportation and the need to able to be driven to campus by a family member.

Rayna was the farthest from home living in on-campus housing. Her family lived an hour and a half away. Rayna noted that not having classes on Friday helped her make the college choice decision, because she could leave campus on Thursday after class and not return until Sunday evening. Rayna grew up 10 miles from a regional university, but still thought the opportunities at City College were more valuable than staying in the rural area where she was raised. Her brother had attended City College and lived in campus housing. This allowed an avenue to stay connected to her family, but also venture out from the family home to some extent. As she self-disclosed, she is a *"very big homebody"* and as soon as it was Thursday and she was out of class, she described with enthusiasm, "I'm gunning it home."

One of the reasons Gear UP pursued a partnership with City College for Grant III is because of City College's location in relation to the communities Gear UP was serving, such as

Bridger, Jayce, and Hannah's high schools. The high schools were within commuting distance, being less than an hour from campus. A huge draw for these Gear UP communities was having City College within a one-hour drive to these schools, with the average driving time being 30-40 minutes. It was the closest and the most affordable college that would allow students to be close enough to stay connected to their homes, families, and communities, while being far enough away from home to feel as if they were getting a college experience at the same time. An exception to this model is that Jayce's rural high school was closer to a different community college[12]. Jayce felt that too many people from his high school utilized that option as a source of convenience, and he wanted more of an urban feel when making his choice. The Gear UP Liaison at City College provided Jayce ample exposure to City College and how it would be a different experience from choosing to attend the local rural community college.

Mikey and Kyle lived at home during the first year of college, and neither owned a car. Nor did they want the expense of living on campus. They decided that the location and convenience of City College was an extra benefit to finances. Attending City College eliminated the need for transportation and housing options: "I mean it was super close to home, so I didn't have to worry too much about transportation. It was cheaper." Six of the nine initial participants commuted to City College. Only two commuter participants lived in the technical district, meaning the other four commuters did so from distance of 17 miles, 33 miles, 36 miles, and 41 miles, respectively. Hannah stated: "The prices and how close it was. It was easier for me to get to." For years City College had a slogan: "Stay close, go far." Jayce surmised that same line of thought, that it is far enough away to establish your own identity and not be defined by your high school peers, but close enough to be able to commute and still have the support of your family.

[12] There are nine rural community colleges in the state and three urban community colleges.

Starting with the seed of "I am college material" that was planted somewhere along the journey in the participants' stories and resulted in making decisions to move toward college choice, the researcher reviewed stated influences by the participants. The influences were consistent with each of the nine initial participants, from the influence of family, the experiences of siblings, to the high school administration that set the college-going culture in the respective high schools. Eight of the nine showed strong support for starting at a community college. Eight of the participants possessed familial habitus that supported community college attendance with the belief that the major offered was a good fit, or that the financial burden was low. Kyle was the outlier. Kyle possessed high cultural capital and exposure to college going materials from his residential high school. His community college choice did not align with his peers or high school expectations. However, once the realization of the lack of scholarship money available, Kyle's parents accepted Kyle starting at a community college as "not what they had in mind, but acceptable." Community college choice for the highly qualified student appeared to be informed with equal consideration to cost, major, location of the college, and the faculty-to-student ratio allowing for potential student engagement and campus involvement opportunities.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS: COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

The second data set was focused on the community college experience. Student affairs research has included a plethora of data encompassing the university experience. This study will add to the data for community college student affairs practitioners. Of the nine original participants, only Samantha, did not participate in the second set of interviews. The experience data set includes campus connection, engaged professors, mentors, the process of self-actualization, and the transfer student capital gained from the first-year experience

Campus Connection

The participants reflected the size of the campus, the ability to be involved, the sense of approachability and accessibility of the professors, and the relationships formed that helped the students feel connected to the campus. Being a big fish in a small pond is an appeal for some students. Community college "support structures are used to encourage relationship building and a sense of belonging" (NAPSA, 2020). The sense of belonging was enhanced as students became involved in different arenas on campus.

The level of engagement with professors was repeatedly mentioned throughout the narratives. Jayce felt the size of the campus and the faculty-to-student ratio mimicked his high school experience, resulting in a very personable relationship with the professors, who showed concern for each student's learning. The class sizes were very similar to what Jayce was accustomed to in high school, which he felt eased the fear and intimidation of entering the classroom. The students recognized that the large lecture-hall style classes that are seen at the State University scared them, and now that they were part of City College, they appreciated the professors calling them by name. Hannah described this as an environment that "allows me to

connect with my professor more, and make it easier for me to pay attention, than being in this huge room with 100 other people." Hannah continued, stating that in her physics and chemistry courses, she felt comfortable enough to ask questions, and that each person in her course was asked to participate and contribute. By the end of the second term, the connections Hannah made in class and the level of comfort she felt had increased. She described grabbing lunch with friends and discussing the course, which made her feel more connected than attending a class and just packing up and never looking back. The participants recognized the one-on-one attention the professors provided and how the student felt they were invested in as individuals.

The participants expressed they could be as involved as they wanted. Of the nine initial participants, two were involved in student government, three lived on campus and went to housing events when they wanted a break or additional engagement, one was a college athlete, and one was highly involved in a student organization. The one participant who had no connection from on-campus housing or student organizations had two jobs on campus and found his connection from the relationships formed through campus employment.

Another avenue for student involvement that was of noticeable value at City College was the on-campus work opportunities. Three participants worked on campus. There was a positive attitude when reflecting on how easy it was for them to find on-campus employment and how deeply the employment helps connect first-year college students with the campus community at City College. Mikey talked about having two jobs on campus. He expressed that when you spend so much time on campus, you start to feel like you are a "permanent fixture" and you know the halls like the back of your hand. Kyle also spoke about his on-campus employment and the connection it provided on campus. He felt like the people he worked around were highly interested in his successes and were very helpful. Colleges and universities offer student-worker

positions[13] on campus. It is notable in the findings that the positive effect on the student workers resulted in additional hours on campus. The accumulation of time spent on campus made the students more comfortable and increased their sense of belonging.

The President at City College proudly proclaims that City College provides a university experience at a two-year institution with a much better price tag. Much research has been conducted over the last decade on the importance of student involvement. City College has the design and structure that is common practice in Student Affairs divisions that are known to increase engagement and connection to the college campus. As of 2020, City College reports over 35 active clubs and organizations. Student organizations at City College are student-generated. The organizations are sustained by student interest. New student organizations are formed and chartered by completing simple paperwork and finding an employee of City College to be a sponsor[14]. The organizations function within the patterns of student interest. Each organization maintains a governing constitution and bylaws that spell out the purpose and intent of the organization. As an example, during his first year at City College, Bridger noticed that there was no Running Club for students who liked jogging and running. Bridger talked about his interest in running; he decided to go to an event that hosted a 5K run. An administrator approached him and encouraged him to start a running club. Bridger was impressed that a campus leader would seek him out and see the potential in him to lead a student organization.

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[13] There are two types of campus employment opportunities. Work-study positions are based on financial qualifications and are based on the government funds to the institution. These positions do not cost the college or university funds because they are funded by monies allocated to the higher education institution. Student worker positions are budgeted in departmental budgets. The student does not qualify for a work-study position and can work up to 20 hours per week.

[14] Campus employees are not allowed to advocate or influence the chartering of s student organization. Each organization must have substantial student interest, because there are budgets attached to the organizations. In community colleges, there are years some organizations lie dormant until another group of studentss shows interest and re-charters the organization. Then the budget is re-activated. During dormant years, the budget simply earns interest.

Rayna was a member of the Baptist Collegiate Ministry and met the majority of her friends through the like-mindedness of the group. Rayna even traveled with some of the members for a weekend getaway. “I am a member of the BCM, the Baptist Collegiate Ministry, and I absolutely love it.”

Student Senate is another involvement opportunity for City College students who enjoy student government, and who want to have a say in measurable change on the campus. The Student Senate is elected by the campus body. If students become members of the Executive Board, they have the authority to allocate a portion of student fees[15] to award student organizations monies and plan campus events. Mikey was in Student Senate one semester, but decided with his workload and course load, it was not worth the time commitment, even though he continued to attend and participate in many school activities and volunteered as a student tour guide[16]. Savannah talked about the substantial impact of being a student senator, as well as her service as the Senate President-elect, and how that affected her community college experience. “Senate just really makes me feel successful. Like, just having a group of people that are behind you 100% is awesome.” Savannah noted that a second-year student, Brianna Sanders, is the person who really encouraged her to get involved in student government. Savannah talked about the process of being elected as the Student Senate President and being stretched outside her comfort zone. Savannah was from a rural high school and a commuter and she went out and campaigned amongst strangers. She described the personal transformation as she took new risks. “I didn't know anybody. I was really shy and now I am the President. So, the total opposite end

[15] The amount of student fees designated to Senate is based on enrollment and State funding each year. The budget range was more than $40,000, but did not exceed $50,000 in any given year.

[16] President Leadership Class could volunteer on campus in variety of ways. One way to serve was volunteering as a tour guide to act as an ambassador for City College. Another was being a part of student panels. When groups came to campus, current students talked about college experience through the eyes of current students.

of where I was–pretty crazy." In Savannah's earlier comments about her rural community, and how women in her town were given two options for justifying college, as either a nurse or a teacher, it is clear that even though Savannah had resources and parent and family support, Savannah was commuting almost an hour a day. The commute made it more of a challenge to come to campus for a simple meeting or to extend her day even longer on days she had science labs. That disconnect was resolved as she became involved as a student senator and then was elected Student Senate President.

Residential housing is another way students can become immersed in campus culture (Tinto, 1987). For the three participants who were able to live on campus, they each felt this gave them access to friendships and involvement that would not have transpired without the opportunity to live on campus. Bridger relayed how living on campus allowed him options to be as connected as he wanted to be. If he needed a study break, he could walk into the clubhouse and play pool or ping pong and strike up a conversation with someone. City College was able to expand its recruiting territory when it added campus housing in 2015[17]. This is noteworthy because for the lowest quintile of students, this housing option was completely furnished and had all the amenities of an apartment. With relatively low tuition and fees, any additional Pell money could be used to pay for housing. Living on campus was another avenue for students to be connected to City College. Paige, a student athlete, spoke favorably of her connection to campus through the lens of student housing. She talked about how the second-year students helped her through course work because they were veterans and knew how to navigate the ropes. Paige reflected on forming close relationships and weekly traditions like watching *The Bachelor* reality television series together. Residential housing was another outlet where the students felt an

[17] City College opted to build apartment-style units where each student could have his or her own room with a shared living room and kitchen. They had a choice of a two-bedroom or a four-bedroom apartment.

additional connection to campus. It became their home away from home.

Unlike some universities where housing events are restricted to on-campus residents only, at City College, students were allowed to participate and be invited to housing events to be part of the community. This allowed for commuters who had friends living on campus an additional space to be involved, welcomed, and connected to campus. Regardless of being an on-campus resident or a commuter, the housing opened up new levels of student engagement and involvement for City College. On-campus housing options aided in transitioning incoming students. This also allowed for a new way to engage a student and reduced the feeling of settling for something less than the ideal college experience. As a result, students from rural areas were able to live on campus if they so desired and could afford the additional expense.

Engaged Professors

Prior to the analysis, I was not aware of or anticipating the undeniable impact a professor would have on the community college experience. All nine participants spoke about the professors and how impressed and satisfied they were with the delivery of education. Many viewed the professor as a significant influence on experience, as well as a mentor influencing their future degree aspirations. The advising roles, engagement opportunities, athletics, and sponsorship of student organizations are natural moments of increased engagement on a college campus. However, what was prominently pronounced was the role of the community college professor and how significant it was to the students' college experience. The frequency with which professors were referenced was substantial as the researcher worked through the process of unraveling each story. Mikey shared during the second interview, "I think that seriously the best part about the City College experience is the professors." Mikey was sharing how he was mesmerized by how much more there was to learn, and he had not felt the last years of high

school had stretched him academically. The researcher was keenly aware of a segment of standout professors who did not spend their days simply professing, but really made themselves available for the students to find a passion for the subject matter or to have additional support as community college students. Community college faculty are "practitioners in the art of instruction" (Cohen & Brawer, 1977, p. 3). The academy can place a misconception on professors who choose to teach in a community college setting with a false belief that the professors who stay in such an environment must be second-rate or lacking credentials needed for a more prestigious university setting. While some professors at community colleges do not possess a terminal degree, many do. The reason the professors have decided to spend their careers at a community college is because they truly love the art of teaching. 70% of the teachers at Kyle's high school have terminal degrees[18]. After the second semester of community college, he looked back at his classroom experience. He thought his professors were exceptional and stated, "I'm surprised that they're only teaching at a community college."

The professors at community colleges do not have the pressure or responsibility to produce research. As a result, the professors have more margin to engage and mentor students, if they decide to invest in them. The standout professors are easily accessible, engage in the curriculum in a creative way, and deliver the material to increase understanding. Garrison (1967) wrote that a defining characteristic of the community college instructor is the distinct focus on students and their pedagogical needs in the classroom setting, rather than on the constraints and

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[18] Oklahoma Science and Math website relays the college preparatory approach is as follows: "Everything at OSSM supports students' academics-from the school's residential model, college-level curriculum and largely doctoral-level teaching faculty (70%) to required evening study halls staffed with faculty and absence of cell phones and personal internet." (osssm.edu, 2021).

pressures of the academic discipline, furthermore suggesting that the most important activity of community college faculty is teaching. The learning outcomes mimic the university setting, but the collected data presents a recurring theme that the classroom experience was coupled with outstanding delivery of learning with a level of care for the student as an individual. Kyle noted when reflecting on the professor's skills and behaviors, "But I think the reason that they stay, is, is the reason why I would want to go...to come here, because they care."

Approaching college curriculum can present a challenge to many students. This is true for students who are considered highly qualified. For some students, it is the first occurrence in which the student has spent time devoted to studying. The students are asked to interact with curriculum independently, while discovering how to use time wisely to engage with material in a constructive manner. Before starting college, students' time management can be guided by their parents, teachers, and school counselors. Hence, when high school graduates first enter college, they are often faced with the monumental obstacle of having the most time outside of the classroom, and no idea how to manage that time. Time management skill is essential as a student transitions to college (Hooker & Brand, 2010). It is a learned skill, moving from the need to study and prioritize responsibilities to adequately prepare, allocating enough time to successfully complete college coursework responsibilities such as projects, preparing for tests, and fulfilling course obligations.

Students no longer have direct access to their parents to provide accountability that homework is complete and correct. Separation from parents combined with the natural tendency to be intimidated by college professors makes professor approachability a very special occurrence in the campus encounter. When professors check on students individually, it demonstrates a level of care. "Community college faculty stand out from many of their

professorial colleagues not only because of the size and diversity of their sector of higher education, but also because teaching—far more than research or service—is the heart of their profession" (Huber, 1998, p. 12). When the professor takes time to check on the student as a human, the level of engagement increases substantially. Jayce expressed that his professors went around and checked in with the students, asking how the students were doing and responding with ease to questions that brought clarification to the subject matter. The responsiveness of the professors made an impression upon Jayce as well. "I really like being able to email the professor, I really don't understand this. Could you go over it in class tomorrow, or just shoot me a tip or something?" Jayce felt the methods the professors used to interact on a personal level showed concern for the individual. He also thought this would not have been the case at a large State University. Jayce echoed a common concern of being lost and just a number at a large university. When students are from smaller high schools, many teachers know them, know their families, and have a genuine concern about their future. There is a fear that the professors will not give the same level of care if the class size exceeds a large student-to-faculty ratio. The fear derives from these questions: "What do I do if I need help or do not understand the material? My professor does not even know my name." The concern of anonymity can prove to be a significant factor in deciding to start at a college with a more personable reputation. For some people, that fear is overwhelming, and more than enough to discourage college enrollment. While they may not have known from the onset that a community college could offer notable access to professors, it certainly became a reason to stay at City College, especially as classwork became more advanced.

Bridger and Kyle are both in technical fields which rely on complex problem solving. The professors have to successfully create a solid foundation before the students can move to

critical thinking skills and the higher-level Bloom's Taxonomy of Application. Bridger spoke candidly of a programming professor whose methods were extremely effective with Bridger's learning style. He could apply the knowledge he learned to solve these high-level problems that cybersecurity majors have to unravel to stand out in the field. Kyle had the same experience and felt that even though he was not extremely versed in computers, the professors were patient and taught in a way that he was able to absorb and apply the information in the future.

The data depicts a few instances where a student had a rough start with one professor, paired with the realization that processing certain subjects would be more of a challenge. As a college student, a shift must occur to be able to assess one's ability to succeed in a course and determine how to seek assistance when challenges present themselves. The students must become "independent, self-reliant learners" (Conley, 2007, p. 5). Rayna, an environmental engineering major, finds English more difficult. Her first attempt at English Composition 1 did not go well. On her second attempt, Rayna was aligned with a standout professor. Rayna spoke fondly of the difference and how Professor Bailey changed the trajectory of Rayna's English experience:

> I was taught the second time by Professor Bailey and I loved her. She was able to teach me steps and she would help me figure out what I did wrong. She was always there for me to talk to. She was, like, now I know you're feeling a little iffy on this. Do you need any help? Professor Bailey was always there and it just, it blew my mind….To just to get in a class where as long as you work hard, you're going to succeed, just was a very big blessing.

This professor changed Rayna's mindset in regards to her ability to succeed in an English course. As an engineering major, her first attempt in English did not go well. She did not feel her brain

processed information in a way that works well with English and composing written communication. Professor Bailey took the time to help Rayna and believe in her and it changed her mindset and confidence that she could be successful in this course.

Hannah recalls a time in the semester when she had a crisis because a close family member fell ill. She found that she could discuss this with the professor. They were understanding and reasonable about accepting her assignments. Hannah felt understood and cared for during a time of uncertainty with a family member's health. Hannah contacted the professor with concern about how her absence would impact the course she was taking. Hannah explained the situation. Hannah relayed a sense of support evidenced by the given flexibility and compassion, and with the deadline extensions to submit assignments. She recognized professors are humans and have compassion when life hands you a curve ball.

Reflecting back to Savannah's rural high school perspective and feeling that women were relegated to limited options of being either a nurse or a teacher, her encounter with a City College professor inspired to expand her interests and options and change her major. Savannah described her female chemistry professor:

> First semester, I had Angela Papagolos and she was amazing. She's actually the one that inspired me to switch my major to Chem. So, I love her, she's awesome. But, just seeing, how she felt about chemistry. I was like, I feel this way, too. So, I could be where she's at someday, you know?

Savannah felt not only inclined to change her major, she stated, "I could be where she is at career-wise and everything." Exposure to people you identify with can be an awakening as the college student broadens their horizons, moving from the rural community that was home, to

becoming liberated, with access to a female college professor who shares the same passions and love for a subject matter.

Mentors

Mentoring relationships are prevalent throughout history. Mentoring is typically a one-on-one relationship between a mature, well-versed individual in relation to a less experienced individual for the purpose of development, growth, and learning (Brown et al., 1999). “From the legacy of famous mentoring relationships comes the sense of mentoring as a powerful emotional interaction between an older and younger person, a relationship in which the older member is trusted, loving, and experienced in the guidance of the younger” (Merriam, 1983, p. 162). Mentoring in more specific terms “is a process by which persons of a superior rank, special achievements, and prestige instruct, counsel, guide and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of persons identified as protégés” (Blackwell, 1989, p. 9). In colleges and universities, there are spaces which allow seasoned adults to invest in students to help the students navigate college, become involved, and feel seen. At a community college, the mentoring relationships are not uncommon between advisor and advisee, faculty and student, sponsors of student organizations and students, coach and player, and student life staff and students. However, the research uncovered several narratives where older peers were identified in some type of mentoring role. This was another unexpected finding and has implications for future programs and pairing students with a peer who can walk beside them through the journey.

The coding demonstrated the repeated occurrences of influential individuals who were seasoned professionals investing in the students. Mentoring relationships are ones that have roots in supporting the development of an individual through another person who provides and supports the emotional well-being of the individual (Levinson et al., 1978). Savannah talked

about the Vice President of Student Affairs at City College with a very hands-on approach, pushing her to perform in class, but also to be involved. “VP Newbold continues to push me to get more involved, and it's....Sometimes it's annoying but, usually, [sigh and smile] it's great.” The mentor can also act as a vehicle to engagement, pushing to encourage and motivate the student protégé to deepen and expand their horizons. The Vice President of Student Affairs at City College’s former role was an academic advisor. This equipped him with skills that are not necessarily prevalent in every person in this administrative role. Research suggests the career path of the mentor to mentee influences how the relationship is approached and in what vein it is most effective, from business leaders to the academic lens of experience (Roberts, 2000). To complete the picture, this individual is a former U.S. Army Colonel. He is described as a giant teddy bear with a façade of a scowl on his face as he encourages the student to “embrace the suck” while checking on the student, pushing them toward their potential and supporting them along the way: “I love my advisor– he's the best, and whenever we make my schedule, he just kind of scratched his head and he's like, this next semester is gonna be pretty tough.” This Vice President was mentioned by three participants, who were all assigned to him as advisees due to the President’s Leadership Class[19]. PLC gave these particular students access to the Vice President by being a part of the scholarship program.

Support Social Theory is described as "information leading the subject to believe he is cared for and loved, esteemed, and a member of a network of mutual obligations" (Cobb, 1976, p. 300). The role of supportive relationship can reduce stress and help the individual deal with transition challenges. House (1981) has proposed four broad categories of social support:

Emotional support (esteem, affect, trust, concern, and listening)

[19] Student Affairs administrators are assigned PLC students to advise and support throughout the two years at City College.

Appraisal support (affirmation, feedback, social comparison)

Informational support (advice, suggestion, directives, information)

Instrumental support (aid-in-kind, money, labor, time, modifying environment) (p. 23). The VPSA at City College approached his advisees as individuals. Depending on their specific need, he would adjust his approach and provide different components of the social support model based on the individual. He was adaptive to his advisees and their skills.

Jayce also related personally to his advisor, and how much she provided help. This funnel of support from advisor to advisee as noted by social support theory could be framed as emotional support, appraisal support, and even instrumental support as she connected Jayce with employment and housing after a year of being a commuter student. Alyssa, Director of Housing, "helps me out when I am stressed." Jayce described how she was always there to listen and be supportive. Furthermore, Alyssa involved Jayce in housing events, helped him obtain a job in student housing for the next year, and helped him become a resident of student housing. The support the students find by these invested individuals is substantial. Jayce's narrative echoes how much he appreciated his family and their support. He also recognized that getting up and commuting almost an hour was causing problems making it to class. Moving into housing will allow Jayce to eliminate this hurdle from commuter to resident at City College. Bridger, a self-identified introvert, had a unique take on the relationship with Alyssa as a source of help in times of trouble. Bridger stated: "I do feel like I have a support system or the very least an escape system." Bridger related to the fact that he could go and vent and seek support in any times of trouble. Regardless, if the student was an assigned advisee through PLC or a resident, it was evident that this Student Affairs staff member made an impact on the people she was able to reach and mentor.

The Student Affairs staff and the various relationships show an investment in the students' future. By design, Student Affairs divisions are structured with focus on a student's engagement, their course work, and their individual success. At a community college, the relationships may look slightly different from a university setting because if the student progresses and graduates in two years, the relationship typically occurs swiftly, and then it concludes after the two years. Regardless, at times, the mentoring relationship continues through job recommendations and life decisions. Research by Luna and Cullen (1995) noted mentoring relationships are not distinguished by the length of time and can be long-term or short-term, informal or formal, planned or spontaneous. Mikey spoke of his encounter in the office of Student Engagement at City College, as well as his experience working in Academic Advising, and how he felt a family approach to all of these relationships:

> All of the people in student engagement, the staff in academic advising where I worked, and the trio staff…I kind of summarize it as there is like a whole cast, it's a whole cast, it's like *The Office*. There's a whole cast of characters that invest in you. It's awesome.

The final finding, which was unique, and potentially will spark further research, was the mention of a current student, Brianna Sanders. Brianna worked on campus in Student Engagement. She was the Student Senate President, the Women of Purpose President, and an active member of Black Student Association. Brianna actively recruited individuals into student organizations, and she formed meaningful relationships. Pairing a second-year student with a first-year student is an informal mentoring relationship. Research indicates these are typically not recognized by the institution, but are valuable relationships that impact overall experience and connection (Chao et al., 1992). As a second-year student, Brianna Sanders saw potential in students and grabbed them by the arm and said "Join me." Mikey stated

how he enjoyed authentic relationships the most. As Mikey mentioned the importance of organic relationships, Campbell and Campbell (1997) note the informal relationships develop "naturally," and are formulated by similar goals. The researchers' purview reflects on this particular relationship. The individuals were from the same urban high school, they were both STEM majors, and they both wanted to make a positive footprint on society of students that care about people and strive to live a life of service. Brianna fostered relationships in a way that could encourage people from diverse backgrounds due to her various intersects of identity. She was equipped with the social aptitude to reach individuals in a meaningful and authentic way.

Both Samantha and Paige talked about being connected to people who have gone before them. Research states the moving through period "begins once learners know the ropes" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 57). Samantha discussed how these connections helped her be successful, while Paige, as a college athlete, felt very close to the second-year teammates as mentors and friends. During the second interview, Paige was beginning to dread the upcoming events, as the time was drawing near for her teammates to graduate and move on to a university. She felt their absence was going to leave a hole.

Mentoring relationships create connection to campus, increase sense of belonging, and help students strive toward successful behaviors as the student navigates campus. From staff and peers, the investment in students has a positive impact on overall experience and engagement. This relationship can give students an outlet to voice concerns and gain access to find help in a multitude of resources on a college campus. These relationships can be substantial connections to the overall college experience.

Self-Actualization

Maslow's hierarchy of needs addresses self-actualization as the final stage, encompassing the need for growth. Each person has the ability to move towards self-actualization, which is defined by living up to one's potential by addressing all areas of life, including social, intellectual, physical, and emotional components of living. It is a process toward becoming your best self (Maslow, 1971). McNeill (2015) recognizes that becoming empathetic toward others and forming positive relationships are other significant components of self-actualization. The road to self-actualization is not a set or determined path. There is no point at which one has arrived, so to speak. It is moving toward more awareness and social competence (Kenrick et al., 2010). I noticed traces of self-actualization from participants as they reflected about their community college experience. These all become steps toward becoming and transcending toward the people we are meant to be, by gaining greater self-identity and increased confidence to approach life. When a person looks back, he or she may consider some attributes of the community college experience as "peak experiences."[20]

Jayce felt that he grew as a leader by being provided diverse opportunities. Rayna struggled initially with her roommate assignment, but she expressed that the experience prompted crucial conversations that were not always comfortable to her. This would relate back to the literature of transition assets. Rayna's transition assets encompassed her ability to seek advice, find support, and not run away from the conflict. Rayna described her increased belief in her own ability to succeed after two semesters at City College:

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[20] Characteristics of Peak Experiences include the following:
-Fulfillment: Peak: forms a sense of elation.
-Significance: Peak experiences of self-awareness, reflection, introspection similar to steps moving toward self-actualization.
-Spiritual: Peak experiences can lead one to all sense of space time because the individual is deeply immersed in the experience (Prevette, 2001).

> I'm definitely a more confident person. You can't go through those issues and come out still timid. Like, you have to be able to fight through those issues and be able to just understand, hey it's a part of life. You're gonna get bumped, you're gonna get bruised a bit. It's okay. You can come out of it, bruises and cuts heal for the most part and if they're still there, you can work through them. It'll be fine. I'm very grateful for those experiences, even though they were definitely not fun to work through….It's one thing to go through class and know it's difficult, and you just come out and you feel like hey, I did the very best I could, just was at the top of my game, was able to learn so much while I'm at it and just feel like, wow I can actually do this and I'm not gonna fall on my face. (Laughs)....So that was definitely a wow moment for me. It was, ah, very empowering for me.

The researcher finds that any time a student has increased confidence and an ability to succeed, utility is gained. Savannah echoed this idea as she spoke about her own growth in Student Senate as she moved from a shy person from a rural high school to the Student Senate President presenting, with confidence, student government legislation at the State Capitol. As Savannah was suggesting policy changes for colleges and universities across the state, she felt a boost of confidence. Savannah described it as a remarkable shift, which increased her confidence in herself and in her ability to lead people. Similarly, Mikey referenced his pre-calculus course with Professor Xeriland and the experience of expanding his math competency, "*You're expanding my little brain."* Mikey's self-actualization is encapsulated in the process of becoming a capable student in an area where he felt ill-equipped, while Savannah's self-actualization is related to the socialization and increased confidence that transpired because of her City College experience.

The research points us to listen carefully to the narratives of each individual. The participants are creating a case that college fit and connection may be more critical in

determining future outcomes, such as increased engagement and self-actualization. Another component is students' ability to be comfortable and accepted as themselves. Hannah described a relationship that blossomed at City College that allowed her a safe space to be herself. She would work through class problems and they would confide in each other: "We are smart people. We can do this."

The process of gaining self-awareness and the ability to reflect while gaining confidence through struggles and successes is a monumental transcendence toward self-actualization. The personal growth toward self-actualization is part of moving toward identity. The institution cannot stage this, but it can foster it through classroom and campus experiences.

Transfer Student Capital

Cultural capital is the capital the student has based on the environmental systems in which they have been raised. Social capital is increased as students are exposed to more people and more opportunities. "Undermatch" ideology stems from concern that the community college does not create an environment that increases social capital. The "undermatch" student is relegated to a higher education experience that is considered "less than" versus the potential exposure available if the student attended a higher-tiered university based on attributes obtained by test scores and high school performance. The findings conclude that college fit has substantial benefit to the student. The highly qualified student, when connected with the campus, increases output through experiences. In this research, the participants connect in various ways, including student organizations, mentors, professors, and becoming immersed in the community, resulting in a sense of belonging which creates a space for growth. The narratives echoed feelings of appreciation, gratitude, and developmental growth through the community college experience.

Social capital relates to the privileged connections and relationships that envelop

a sense of belonging in spaces by sustaining culture norms of behavior and providing societal benefits that allow a person access to spaces that are beneficial to navigating education, career, and status. People assimilate this knowledge by either the environment in which they are born, or observation of others to mimic socially acceptable behaviors and what seemingly helps the individual to obtain access. “Bourdieu and Passeron asserted the accumulation of knowledge is used to reinforce class differences. That’s because variables such as race, gender, nationality, and religion often determine who has access to different forms of knowledge” (Cole, 2019, p. 1). One motivation in creating “undermatched” was a hope to make college choice narrowed and systematic in nature, with a belief that this formulated approach would lessen the chasm between the students with capital and those who were lacking such privilege. The educational system is deeply rooted in systematic attempts to serve the privileged by excluding populations from access. In its purest form, aligning ability with college choice would create opportunity for those students who lack the capital and access to broaden their personal horizons, and increase capital in what is deemed as the best higher education institution possible. It can be argued, “undermatched” attempts to wash away the societal systems that are designed, funded, and continue to lift the privileged up and keep the populations with capital deficits out. The findings cannot conclude the amount of social capital gained at a community college. The participants mentioned growth, mentors, and strands of self-actualization. However, the amount of social capital gained after one year was inconclusive. Also, there is no adequate way to frame that the community college experience provided this level of capital increase versus what would have been experienced had the student attended a higher-tiered university. Some growth transpires as part of developing from a dependent to an independent member of society. Mikey stated after two semesters of college, “You start to learn how to really, how to really, you know, how you

react and interact with the world around you." It is evident that there were gains laced throughout the narratives, but to measure the level of social capital is not justified.

The capital that was mentioned by the first-year community college student is known as Transfer Student Capital (TSC). After one year at the community college, participants voiced increased preparedness to embrace university life in the future.

> TSC developed from Becker's (1962) human capital theory and Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory. These theories explained the impact of education on an individual's overall quality of life and advantages based on membership in a particular group. TSC, as defined by Laanan and associates (2010), refers to the knowledge students accumulate at two-year colleges in order to negotiate the transfer process to a four-year university (Hayes et al., 2020, p. 1).

Hannah felt the community college foundation would help her when she moved on to the University. Hannah stated, I already have some experience, so I'll know what to expect. Kyle felt that City College was a great place to start, as he was moving to the University after completing two semesters at the community college. Kyle believed that he gained TSC and that he was much more equipped to face the demands of the University after completing two semesters at City College.

Two prominent studies regarding TSC were conducted by Laanan et al. (2011) and Moser (2014). However, Luskvo & Hayes (2020) state, "These studies are limited in that they primarily explore what TSC factors were associated with transfer success, not necessarily how TSC was acquired and used by transfer students." I believe this study begins to formulate contributors to TSC. The students' interaction on campus, mentors, professors, and involvement begin to create increased self-actualization and, in return, results in positive inclinations toward transfer

preparedness. As referenced in Luksvo and Hayes (2020), “Institutional agents, or individuals who occupy one or more hierarchical positions of relatively high status and authority (e.g., advisors, academic deans), were also noted in the literature as significant in facilitating success for community college transfer students” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 4.)

The narratives show increased confidence and beginning preparations toward TSC. It is difficult to assess the amount of capital gained from a comparative standpoint in relation to what it would have been if the student had started in a university setting. The trajectory of one’s life cannot be predicted by variables of who they may have encountered in one higher education institution versus another. The narratives demonstrated that valued relationships emerged and moved a portion of the participants toward increased involvement and self-actualization.

CHAPTER 7:

DISCUSSION AND OVERVIEW

The purpose of the qualitative research was to explore community college choice and experience by the highly qualified student. The first data set focused on community college choice. The second data set explored the community college experience. Outsiders view the community college as a transactional institution for earning basic college course credits. Community colleges are viewed as higher education spaces for the lower class, the poor, or the academically inept student to try college out (Kanter, 2004). The research demonstrated many aspects and factors of choice, as well as the experience that is possible at a two-year institution. Undermatch has taken a front seat in the college and career literature. Undermatch negates the viability of the community college with a hyper focus on high school performance. The deterministic nature of matching high school performance to a certain college or university diminishes the influences of peers, family, and community and the reproductive nature of the system.

The qualitative study implications create conflicted realities. The narratives demonstrate that highly qualified students can be served at a community college. The students can navigate and show tendencies of successful navigation from semester one to semester two. There are relevant and significant areas of support with professors and student affairs practitioners. With the right access to particular programs and people, the campus experience is relevant and emulates a version of the university experience. The truth is, the highly qualified students may have been equipped to find a niche at the more selective university as well. The inherent cultural capital the particular participants possess could have been transferrable to a university setting. As a result, on one hand the research demonstrates that the community college does have the

propensity to educate in a commendable manner, but the sample selected may have been successful regardless of what higher education institutions they selected from the onset. The participants relayed examples of being beneficiaries of school settings that have reinforced their abilities and merits from the onset. The family has contributed to these beliefs. The reproduction is evidenced by the eight of nine students selecting a community college. Eight participants were byproducts of their familial habitus, as either a parent or sibling made the same choice. The familial habitus was reproduced eight times in this particular study. The reproduction of the familial habitus could stifle social mobility. Klor de Alva and Christensen (2020) found that mobility was hindered by attending an open-access college with low success rates and graduation rates. There is a hope that a college education will create upward mobility for a person's life. The fear of not choosing the right college to support those aspirations is a daunting prospect when considering the influences that lead to college choice.

The researcher is aware that if the study had included students with fewer advantages and lower high school achievements, the examples or challenges of campus engagement could have told a different story. The racialized populations that were not included may have a contrasting experience as well. Another notable tension and reality is that the students who were included in the query and the process of sending out the email solicitation represents a blaring deficit of the number of people of color included meeting the criteria established. This is not due to lack of abilities, but it could be a byproduct of the school, class, and opportunities that are being reproduced in the particular community where the student of color resides. The sampling was not considering race as an identifier, but racialized students and their stories of community college experience is relevant and could have added a layer of depth to the research.

The study allows for the bright pockets of this particular urban community college to

shine as positive ideations were stated by participants. However, the possibility remains that the highly qualified student with these specific attributes may have navigated the university system in the same lens due to cultural capital the student possessed. A deeper dive into the implications will explore the familial habitus, the undermatch, and degree selected as related to community college choice by the highly qualified student.

Familial Habitus of College Choice

The first data set provided findings pertaining to community college choice by the highly qualified student. The community college choice of these highly qualified students continuously circled back to reproduction theories. The narratives demonstrated that the family habitus reproduces what is familiar. Of the nine participants, seven had one or more parents who had attended a community college, while six participants noted substantial sibling effect influencing the decision to attend a community college. Oymak (2018) found that one-half of Americans look to their family to make college-going decisions, compared to four percent replicating what their friend group does for college enrollment. As you can see, a friend group can have an influence, but in the data set, the overwhelming point of reproducing outcomes relies on the family and how they view college enrollment. In this study, the family generates the acceptance of being undermatched because the community college was an acceptable choice for the parent and/or the sibling, and the community college fits the family's expectations. This is perpetuating reproduction.

Siblings share stories of problems or successes (Black et al., 2017). Mikey has brothers who were not successful in their first attempt at a university. Therefore, Mikey absorbed the information and transposed it into his narrative, that the university choice would have had a negative impact on experience or persistence. The rejection of the university experience is

mentioned throughout, further justifying choice. As mentioned in the literature, this information is a spillover from siblings' experiences paired with the parents' beliefs in the value added of college attendance, especially when the cost of getting college credits is inexpensive (Goodman et al., 2019).

The cost of college is another area in which the data set depicted a great deal of concern as reinforced by the family. If the student could obtain two years of college at an even more discounted price through scholarship opportunities than the already low college cost, then even better. Seven of the nine participants were recipients of full scholarships covering all tuition. Participants' concern regarding debt ratio was pronounced. This is in contrast to considerations made by family structures residing in the upper quintile when approaching college choice decisions (Goodman, et al., 2019). Furthermore, the higher the quintile in which the student resides, the more aware they are of the rate of being admitted relating back to selectivity and graduation rates. This relates back to the cultural capital and theories of reproduction as the dominant class grapples to hoard opportunities from the working class (Bourdieu, 1977).

The narratives did not mention the potential earnings gained over a lifetime from completing a degree. Not all students have an overwhelming concern about debt. Six of the nine participants mentioned it in the narratives, with many repeated excerpts noting debt and concerns about college expenses. The participants with the reported middle-range household income spoke of college costs holding an enormous weight in their decisions as a significant factor to college choice. The family habitus of cost relating to college choice is another way social reproduction is manufactured. Aligning family ability to fund education with college choice is systematically creating match by social class and not by abilities. The students talked incessantly about cost, but never did they mention any college choice influence discussing graduation rates of the

community college.

Undermatch and College Choice

As the participants reflected back to college choice, not a single participant mentioned graduation rate, selectivity, or transfer concerns about starting at a community college. This demonstrates reproduction theories, as the student was funneled toward community college choice, and relevant factors were ignored regarding mobility to justify the choice. The participants show indicators of interpellation as they enroll in a community college. After enrolling, the participant comes to believe they had all the options afforded to all college goers and made this choice as the best option (Leonardo, 2010). The availability of a particular major at City College was mentioned with choice, but not once was the concern that if they started at a community college, it might lessen their future in a particular field. The participants were completely unaware of the data or the concern undermatch provides when considering if a college was the best option. The family influence was received with far greater reception than any conflicting data high school personnel may have mentioned. As we consider undermatch and the community college, there are some notable exceptions disrupting the rules to social mobility.

The data by Chetty et al. (2017) demonstrate college success rate as evidenced by graduation rate and selectivity increasing outcomes for the students. Therefore, considering undermatch literature looking at the completion rates of a school can predict outcomes such as mobility when accounting for geographical region. There are open-access community colleges that fare better on success rate when using data that is full-time first-time enrollment.

FIGURE 10: Top 9 Colleges by Mobility Rate

TABLE 1. TOP 10 COLLEGES BY MOBILITY RATE

Top 10 Colleges by Mobility Rate (Bottom to Top 20%)					
Rank	**Name**	**Mobility Rate**	**=**	**Access** ×	**Success Rate**
1	Cal State, LA	9.9%		33.1%	29.9%
2	Pace University-New York	8.4%		15.2%	55.6%
3	SUNY-Stony Brook	8.4%		16.4%	51.2%
4	Technical Career Institutes	8.0%		40.3%	19.8%
5	University of Texas—Pan American	7.6%		38.7%	19.8%
6	CUNY System*	7.2%		28.7%	25.2%
7	Glendale Community College	7.1%		32.4%	21.9%
8	South Texas College	6.9%		52.4%	13.2%
9	Cal State Polytechnic-Pomona	6.8%		14.9%	45.8%
10	University of Texas—El Paso	6.8%		28.0%	24.4%

*Includes both 2and 4-year colleges; (Chetty et al., 2017, p. 64)

The top 10 community colleges listed set a very high bar and hopes for potential social mobility and raising the ceiling for upward trajectory (Chetty et al., 2017). The external variables of degree completed, geographic region, and the demographics of enrollment all factor into these exceptional findings of moving from the bottom income distribution to the top income distribution. In a structure where the disparity between the top wage earners and the bottom wage earners is increasing, a shift of one or two quintiles from the bottom is an accomplishment when attending the least funded colleges (Chetty et al., 2014). These particular community colleges debunk the idea that community college is a less-than choice for a graduate's future. However, these findings are special to the region in which they reside, and there is a pairing of degree major and labor market demands that lends itself to increase mobility and earnings in a thriving economic market (Klor de Alva & Christensen, 2020). These factors supersede the undermatch concerns because they allow for open-access community colleges to have added value in these particular regions.

Community College Transfer

Community colleges enroll large populations of students and encompass the most diverse enrollment of any sector of higher education. The community college experience can help a student gain transfer student capital and prepare for the university. Even with increased TSC, the student in the first year of transfer can experience loss of credits, difficulties navigating the system, and a lag to adjusting to the campus nuances (Ishitani & McKintrick, 2010). The undermatched student may encounter these hurdles that could have been avoided completely if beginning at the university in the first place. The narratives in this study demonstrate themes of capital gained through mentoring relationships and increased self-actualization. The community college may not be able to bridge the gap for every student at the same rate, but one way to combat the deficit transfer mentality is for the student to remain at the community college all four years. The CCBs are another avenue to serve the underrepresented population to become bachelor degree holders.

Community College Degree Choice

Whether a student is attending a traditional two-year community college or a CCB, the degree that is being pursued is critical to increasing the trajectory for the student. Carnevale et al. (2017) note that it is vital for the academic advisors to connect major choices with the economic consequences of pursuing particular credentials. Matching the community college students with the average earnings in a given major or credentialing field would propel the matching of potential earnings with completing a program of study. Implications for economic mobility establish a need for the community college to provide information pertinent to particular programs and types of credentials. The students need to be pursing degrees that lead to family-sustaining wages, requiring that community colleges disseminate information about the particular regional job market for each degree (Carnavelle, 2016). Bridger was the only

participant who referenced his choice of major, employability, and the reputation in the market in the region he lives. This is an example of Bridger's cultural capital to articulate and think into the future about the decision to attend a community college as a highly qualified student. Bridger was also the only student for whom neither a parent nor a sibling previously attended a community college. Bridger's choice was directly related to major and being employed, with discussion of the potential salary for the major in the area.

Upon analysis, the data set included six participants who attended rural high schools and then selected to attend the urban community college. The narratives noted the small class size and emphasis for these students that "being a big fish in a small pond" was a significant factor of being comfortable in the urban setting. The exposure to female STEM professors broadened Savannah's narrow scope of possibilities. This is another example of increased capital and self-actualization as seen in the narratives. Pairing these experiences with the initiatives to demonstrate potential earnings and labor markets could increase the cultural capital of the student. The lack of this discussion in the familial habitus is a reflection of the lack of capital the family possesses.

The narratives depict the importance of mentors. Traditional two-year community colleges have a limited time frame to pair first-time students with returning students if the students remain on track to complete coursework within 150% of the desired transfer rate. However, CCBs could benefit from intentionally pairing peers to assist in the needs of students and the lack of funding to have professional staff to meet all the demands. The narratives depict how one student can advocate and encourage in a way to increase engagement. The increased engagement does have a positive outcome with overall experience. Peer pairing is another way to

address the expanded mission of a CCB with a free resource provided to students to help increase success rates of staying at a community college.

Research Questions

The narratives provided an avenue to explore the research questions. Connecting the findings back to the research questions provided insight to the added literature to community college research, community college choice, and implications for future projects.

Why do highly qualified students choose to attend a community college?

College choice started for all the participants as believing they were college material, creating self-efficacy and reinforcing the self-disposition phase in the college choice model (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The participants all felt they belonged in college and planned for the transition after high school to be to college. The funnel to the community college was pronounced by experiences of family members. The parents who attended a community college assisted the choice set to continually filter back to the community college. The spillover of information from siblings also reinforced positive or negative messages regarding any other college choices. Any negative stories of the university, the students incorporated into their ideas about the outcome if they had decided to start at a university. Repeated by parents and siblings alike was the waste of money for basic courses when comparing a university to a community college.

The other finding that was paired with community college choice was the cost, tightly knitted with the concern about college creating unnecessary debt. Cost concern and debt ratio does relate back to social class. In the demographic survey, I relied on self-reported family income. In hindsight, another layer to add to future studies is students inquiring with parents the

amount of student loan debt they incurred in college, current credit score evaluating expenditures to debt ratio, and home ownership. This could potentially relate back to social class and additional evidence of social reproduction.

In this study, high school administrators and exposure to a college campus reinforced college-going messages. Effective teachers, counselors, and peers were noted as speaking about college and creating a college-going climate and a sphere of influence (Goodman et al., 2019). Two participants reflected that even though they all heard the same message, how it was interpreted was based on their family influence. There was no indication that the participants' high schools were pressuring them toward a particular college choice. There was very little talk from spheres of influence regarding the community college being viewed as "less than" or a poor choice for the highly qualified student. Exposure to campus through camps, concurrent enrollment, campus tours, and special events were relayed as positive encounters to become familiar with and to consider the community college. Gear UP made a portion of this messaging possible through a college liaison providing timely college information and opportunities at City College. The most effective messages are personalized with high touch points for low-income students (Goodman et al., 2019).

How do highly qualified college bound students make meaning of the transition to college?

The transition theory allowed for consideration of a student's assets and liabilities throughout the transition from high school to college. The narratives demonstrated that being a commuter can be an asset as well as a liability to transitioning. On one hand, the continued family support when the student was stressed was an asset. Several participants felt that being a commuter caused a liability with arriving to campus on time, travel time, the amount of time available to simply be on campus, and a sense of loss when seeing the housing students being

able to walk over to class without the hassle of commuting.

The assets were most pronounced as the students reflected about experiences in the second data set. As Rayna discussed her growth through roommate challenges, the first semester led to crucial conversations and being paired with an English professor who did not connect with her as well as Professor Bailey. These revelations led the researcher to acknowledge the movement toward self-actualization as participants reflected positive change in their ability to approach challenges. Savannah also showed growth in confidence as she took chances being elected as the Student Senate president.

Samantha did not persist to participate in interview two. I felt this was unfortunate. Samantha's first interview included statements of passionate devotion to be the first to complete college in her family. She stopped out sometime during the middle of the second semester. I would have liked to capture what caused the disruption or bump in the road that led to stopping out for this season. This is in no way making any assumptions that she will not return or one day make it to college graduation. The narratives would have been more complete with a story that derailed from the steady pace of persistence. However, I could not locate or get Samantha to return any calls, texts, emails, or attempts to complete the second round of interviews. The liabilities transition may have been more pronounced when a student has been unable to persist for a semester, but that data was unable to be obtained.

How do highly qualified students view the overall first-year experience at a community college?

The second data set was the opportunity to discuss the first year of community college as a highly qualified student. The narratives depicted of the urban community college created an experience for this data set. The revised Astin's model for engagement utilized for the study

demonstrated the experience and connection as it correlated to the input and impacted the overall output for year one. The findings reinforced that community college campus connection can be prevalent through a multitude of campus interactions and outlets. Campus employment, campus housing, being an athlete, student organizations, PLC student, or even a peer mentor encouraging the student toward engagement, increased positive affect as it related to engagement and experience. The unexpected findings were the pronounced impact and impressions professors and peers had on the participants' development toward success and their deep ties to campus.

Professors at City College were noted for being approachable, responsive, caring, and remarkably skilled at teaching. This was a significant finding because it was echoed in every narrative. Professors at the community college describe loving the art of teaching and finding their place to serve students, meeting them where they are academically. Not all community college faculty are first-generation, but the propensity to go back and teach in the background from which you started is common. When a first-generation faculty member is paired with a first-generation college student, Chase and Rodriguez's (2010) research describes the phenomenon as the professor acknowledges there are many "diamonds in the rough." This helping relationship creates a sense of greater purpose and fulfillment when educating students who may not have a sense of their own potential. The faculty find that investing in students who show appreciation for the time spent with them is valuable. We saw this repeatedly in this study. First-generation and working-class students, in many cases, view education as a privilege rather than as an entitlement (Chase & Rodriguez, 2010). The thirst for knowledge creates an insatiable appetite to learn more, be more, and achieve more to prove to the world, their family, or their community that they can achieve what society deems as success. The findings heard this in Samantha's narrative as determined to not give up and to make it to degree attainment. Finally,

the research conducted by Chase and Rodriguez (2010) notes the desire to pay it forward by effecting positive change for the future. First-generation professors have a tendency to want to help students who have a similar background or story. The faculty interactions were reported as significant, from special attention, help on projects, checking in on progress, and providing substantial feedback on work submitted resulting in significant connection inside the classroom.

Peer influence was noted as creating an organic bridge between first-year students and second-year students. This has further implications for how to connect commuter students, first-generation students, and any other population that sits on the fringe. It was very interesting that two different participants noted the same peer as substantial to experience. I find that community college professionals have to reach students in a multitude of ways. People receive relationships and connection on a personal level. While one student may want a formalized connection, such as a cohort model or a student organization, another student may desire relationships to be formed organically. Both needs should be met. Whether organic or planned, there cannot be only one path to connection and influence on experience. Connection to a predominantly commuter campus must be approached from many different angles to provide a plethora of opportunities for connection.

How do the participants college experiences relate to being undermatched?

After a deep dive into social reproduction literature and the ramifications for opportunity for the lower quintiles pertaining to social class, the researcher gained deeper understanding of the undermatch focus. However, the literature cannot change the spheres of influence in a family, the systems of reproductions, or the economic markets that the community college students enter. If there is an initiative for change in the sphere of opportunity and labor markets, the change would also come from funding. The system ensures that the open-access institutions are

the least funded. Inversely, the most prestigious, highest-costing institutions are the most highly funded. This perpetuates the system.

The concern is that attending a community college will stifle the potential to develop needed capital for social mobility because of the lack of exposure to the university setting. This is subjective to whom the student encounters and difficult to create a comparative analysis. From the data presented by Chetty et al. (2014), findings include social mobility potential if paired with the correct major and a specific geographic region. However, what was apparent is that transfer student capital was increased for the participants of the study. Transfer student capital in relation to increased self-efficacy was not the context the study applied in the research conducted.

Self-efficacy is context-specific and refers to a singular task (Bandura, 1994). The context in this study was self-efficacy in relation to college choice: specifically, the development from a young age wherein a person develops a belief that their future includes college, that their skills and abilities belong in college, and ultimately that the individual is college material. However, self-efficacy can also be approached from the confidences gained at the community college, seeking a bachelor's degree, transferring, involvement, and other moments of empowerment that occur in an intimate college experience. Research from Moser (2014), Barnett (2010), and Lukszo and Hayes (2019) suggests that relationships formed at a community college may enhance students' self-efficacy. Additional work credits transfer student capital increased by positive relationships (Moser, 2014).

Implications for Practice

From the data analysis, the implications for practice are plentiful. As a student affairs practitioner and a developer of new student initiatives, implications for practice include but are

not limited to the following: recruitment practices aiding in community college choice, first-year experience, and transfer advancements.

Community College Choice

Recruitment practices that lead to community college choice at City College have been approached from being a source of college-going information for identified schools. This is effective to help the potential student to receive information about all colleges. The practices do not currently include consideration for siblings or children of families that attended a community college. The data depicted how strong the spillover effect is for the highly qualified student included in the data set. Recommendations to maximize this natural funnel of family history of college choice is to create events to invite the entire family to campus, strengthen alumni relations to have multiple touches with the family throughout the years, and develop a sense of pride in the community college alumni, capturing a theme of "small beginnings." The community college cannot compete with university alumni relations, the traditions, or prestige affiliated with the university. However, embracing the community college mission, the alumni offices can tie back to "small beginnings" to capture a sense of pride in the alumni success stories. Furthermore, creating legacy scholarships for alumni to invest in and for their families to benefit from is another bridge to increase enrollment. The community college is never going to generate the prestige of the university from the outsiders, but for the insiders whose lives have been changed, capital was gained, and upward trajectory occurred, the acknowledgment that the community college was a launching point in their lives can generate pride. Even though the community college is accused of "cooling-out" dreams for many (Kaliszeski, 1998), it still provides the redemptive mission of a chance at higher education, whether that be due to cost, location, lack of capital, first-generation, or feelings of not being smart enough for college.

First-year Experience

When analyzing data and considering undermatched concerns, social reproduction theory, and upward mobility, it is clear the lack of cultural capital is a consistent concern for the community college student. Two initiatives designed to increase capital for the community college population through first-year experience include career match and graduation campaign.

Through the exploration of literature and the data (Chetty et al., 2017) pointing to community college successes in upward mobility trends, the need for career match may exceed the concern of college match. The first-generation students and the lower SEC students do not have the same knowledge base of career options. Career match with skills and giftedness paired with labor demands in the region creates a capital the community college student has been known to be lacking. Intentional first-year experience initiatives that address career match can pay dividends for the students lacking capital and understanding of selecting a career choice to earn lifestyle-sustaining wages.

Designing a campaign to increase graduation and create ownership with each new group of first-year students gives motivation toward goals of graduation. Naming the first-year full-time student by potential graduation year gives them a target year to complete the two-year course. Honest conversations about graduation trends for community colleges and how to combat these trends is imperative to make a difference. Modeling community college practices with exceptional graduation outcome is wise. Creating a cohort mentality to graduation year and giving students ownership toward progression creates a feeling of commitment to successful completion. If community colleges want a shift in the graduation data, they must create practices to move the needle.

Community College Campus Involvement

The impact of involvement did not vary for community college students. The more on-campus involvement, the greater the outcome. The research depicted that the areas of on-campus housing, student employment, athletics, trio, student organizations, student senate, and PLC were all outlets to campus engagement. This is true at a university and at a community college. The challenge for community colleges is connecting the commuter student in a meaningful way.

Programming to include more students in campus involvement is essential for increased graduation rates (Tinto, 1987; Astin, 1984). The narratives echoed that seasoned peers partnered with first-year students increased experience. With this in mind, intentional peer mentoring programs would increase involvement, ultimately increasing graduation rates. In addition, CCBs note that peer mentoring programs would help with more service demands placed on the CCBs without additional resources (Lukszo and Hayes, 2020). Successful peer mentoring programs could also potentially bridge the transfer process.

Intentional Increase in Transfer Student Capital

Transfer student capital must be written into the community college strategic plan and not occur haphazardly. The interviews depicted potential transfer student capital, but it was due to the access of administrators or resources. Successful transfer without losing credits is critical for the students and their movement toward degree attainment (Fink, 2021). Honest conversations about articulation agreements and how each major has different transfer ramifications at different universities is beneficial to the student transferring. Transparency in advising is critical.

To increase transfer capital, having a strong relationship with the receiving institution will benefit the student. Orchestrating campus visits, connecting the student to the transfer office, and finding staff invested in the student's well-being at the university are all areas to increase

transfer student capital. Community college students lacking cultural capital need faculty and staff to help pave a way toward transfer. This must occur with intentionality and equity for all students desiring to transfer successfully to the university.

Contribution to Community College Research

College choice for the highly qualified student is an addition to community college research. The sibling effect and parent influence is relative in recruitment of the community college student, connecting with the constituents who believe in the community college mission, and reinforcing the niche a community college provides for students. If a parent or sibling had attended a community college, it paved the way for being ready to enroll in a community college as the starting point for seeking a college degree. The cost and location were also contributing factors to community college choice. The students reiterated the quality of education for a fraction of the cost and felt confident that community college was the most reasonable choice as a means to transfer and become established in the higher education landscape.

The vertical order of higher education, the funding of the community college, and social reproduction theory added depth to the research that considered societal factors into choice and social mobility that was unbeknownst to the researcher at the onset of the project. This literature gave the researcher a more robust understanding of the intent of undermatch and also acknowledgment that denying the contributions of a community college is not going to change the systemic design of higher education structure.

The research included three students who lived in campus housing. Campus housing is a way to be plugged into and connect with any campus. The commuter students miss out on the built-in connectivity. This is not exclusive to the community college commuter. All student affairs practitioners must be creative and intentional in connecting with commuter students. The

narratives depict other ways to be connected, including but not limited to the following: campus employment, student organizations, professors investing time and feedback, student government, sports, mentors such as advisors and organization sponsors, and peers. Institutional agents are not defined by position. It is the connection a person finds that promotes their connectivity to campus and helps them navigate while a student. Moser (2014) writes that interactions with institutional agents such as advisors, professors, and student affairs staff ‘‘promote the development of capital and give students an advantage as they move into a four-year education environment’’ (p. 55-56).

An expansion to increase connectivity is peer mentoring from a seasoned community college student to a novice. With two-year institutions, this would be a challenge, because of the short amount of time peers would have with each other if each student was progressing as a full-time student. However, there are implications from the findings at a two-year college of how peer mentoring would be an effective additional service offered in two areas. First, peer-to-peer mentoring from sending community college students to transfer institutions with a student who was also a transfer student at a university and had assimilated into the university population. Research shows the community college students typically adjust after a year of university experience (Ishitani & McKintrick, 2010). Peer-to-peer mentoring could accelerate the adjustment period. The other area in which peer mentoring has the potential to enhance service and experience is at CCBs, with resource constraints from offering a bachelor’s degree as an underfunded institution (Martinez, 2017). The research shows that the community college establishes “transfer student capital” and confidences as the student prepares for the transfer university.

Community colleges must design initiatives to provide marginalized populations with exceptional degree option planning paired with truthful earnings in the labor market. A disconnect can occur for low SEC students when selecting a major that leads can sustain a wage to support the lifestyle the student seeks. It also increases knowledge to make an educated decision about the person's future earning potential. Financial stability is not the sole reason to become an educated citizen, but there is a consideration that seeking a degree is tied to the hope of having a lifestyle that provides comfort and alleviates daily struggles to meet basic needs.

Future Studies

The research stimulated ideas for future studies to expand the work that was started with this project. The future studies include topics of "transfer student capital," choosing a college major, professor fit to community college mission, underrepresented populations' exposure to employable degree options, and marginalized populations community college choice paired with college preparation and social class.

Transfer student capital emerged through the research as the student was completing the first year of the community college experience**.** There are considerations whether to stay at a community college and complete an associate degree or transfer early to not risk losing credit and time. Kyle opted to leave after one year to avoid risking any potential loss of credits in the transfer process. The study design was not focused on transfer capital. However, a future study could generate data with a longitudinal grounded theory approach following a community college student through the transfer process. The study focus would consist of community college students enrolled full-time with intent to transfer after two years of completing community college coursework and earning an associate degree. The associate degree is noted to make transfer of credits to be seamless. Following the students' transfer process, evaluating

services and advising at the receiving university, as well as deciphering any lost credits even through the promise of the 2x2 articulation agreement. The longitudinal study would contain narratives from each year looking for timelines when the student adjusted to university life, avenues of involvement, and finally assessing how the sending and receiving institutions could better serve the transfer student's needs, thus creating a model that can potentially be derived to create the best bridge-building practices for the transfer student. Taylor & Jain (2017) find transfer pathways are increasing and the pipeline is becoming more diverse. This type of study can also address transfer student adjustment when following the lives and paths of multiple students over an extensive time period.

Since this study stopped at the end of year one, the parameters did not allow for the continuation of the narratives and how the transfer process transpired. Expansion on this research project would be a constant comparative analysis of universities with peer pairing programs to assist in transition, transfer offices devoted to the transfer student, and specific evaluation of transfer programming transpiring at the receiving university. Including experiences of CCB students who do not experience transfer shock would add to the data.

One of the arguments for undermatch is the student cannot gain the same level of capital at a lower tiered higher education institution. A future study designed to follow the highly qualified student, tracking major selected from high school counseling, the start of community college, transferring to a university, college graduation, and moving into the workforce. Evaluating how the student selected the major could reveal holes in how to match skills, major, and employability, creating a greater scope of research in regard to the ramifications of social reproduction theory. Social reproduction theory suggests students who start at a community college have a higher propensity to remain in the same social class and the same economic

bracket as their parental influences, because the system squanders social mobility. Evaluating how the student chooses a major can help, because underrepresented populations and first-generation students may be lacking the cultural capital to make the same major choices as a student with more capital.

The research demonstrated the significant role the professor played in the campus experience and connection. An intriguing grounded theory would be to discover an instrument to analyze the professors that are influential and pinpoint their attributes. Then utilize the data to determine what is the common thread, stories, credentials, stimulate the heart of teaching and serving in the capacity to connect with a community college student. A case study research project to review professor fit to the mission of the community college. Having a narrower focus for first-generation professors' motivations for serving first-generation students would allow for additional research in the field. This research could shed light on the process of moving through college as a first-generation student and moving toward becoming a professor in the world of academia, as well as a "fit" test to be established that is a device to measure likelihood to be a change agent in a 21st-century community college. The instrument could be designed to measure the willingness to do one's part, to serve the students with less capital, the motivations to teach in the least prestigious higher education institution, the heart for service, and the understanding of the times when you face college students who are underprepared.

It was insightful to recognize the number of rural students who decided to commute to an urban community college. As recognized by this study, many students moved from rural high schools to an urban community college. As demonstrated in Savannah's narrative, she had limited exposures to female scientists and believed a female interested in a STEM field must become a nurse. Nursing is a high-demand field, but research shows that females from low-

income backgrounds and underrepresented students of color are more likely to enter majors that lead to lower-remuneration employment (Carnevale et al., 2016). A new study could address this phenomenon and research avenues for change in disservice to the given population. Studying this population and gaining insight to the information gaps in career majors can also assist community colleges in service to the students.

As mentioned, the most significant regret was not including race as an identifier in the initial query. Following that grave oversight, I now wish that I would have asked questions regarding race as part of the narrative interviews. As a result, I would have known more from the Native American participants about their community college choice and unpeeled the culture aspects that potentially informed decisions. If this study would have been approached from a constant comparative analysis including marginalized community college choice and analyzed through the differences and similarities of race versus social class, I believe rich meaningful data would have been included. The potential for expanding on the research is significant and add to community college research.

Conclusion

On the onset of the study, I was disturbed by the exclusivity and proposition of undermatch. The focus on selectivity and graduation rates felt narrow and closed-minded. Community college insiders ascribe to the belief that graduation rate is neither a complete nor a fair picture of success. Exceptions exist when the student selects to transfer early. Chetty et al. (2017) demonstrate exceptions to the social mobility trends for the top community colleges. The deterministic nature of undermatch does not include the exceptions or the stories of success that can result in attending an open access community college. The community college can provide a viable space for a student to engage and learn.

The cooling-out effect is another avenue to place criticism on the only public higher education institutions allowing a student of any caliber to give college a try. If a university allowed the same rate of exploration for the general public, I believe similar statistics would exist for the university. The university students would also face a soft denial or a change of major to something perceived as easier and with less earning potential. Cooling-out is part of letting people have a chance who may not be college material. However, the research makes it appear to be a community college issue, when in actuality, it may be an open access issue, which a university does not have to approach the same way.

As I became more familiar with the research and began to understand the stratified structure of higher education as well as reproduction theories, I understood why college match literature was created and undermatch was stated as a problem situated in those initiatives. It is not designed to be a focused attack on community colleges, but an attempt to enhance ability based on high school performance for more exposure to the most selective institutions that are known for increased mobility. Once I moved from the pluralistic view of education, I began to fully understand reproduction that is influenced by the structures of schools. My mindset shifted that matching is not based on class, but on merits. If the potential college goer resists the funneling staged by cultural reproduction, there is opportunity to disrupt the system. My biggest regret in the study is not including the racialized components exploited in the system and how those narratives would have made substantial contributions.

Community colleges meet a specific niche of access and opportunity for millions of students in America. The CCBs meet a need for communities and individuals they serve. The community college is the least funded institution in the stratified system, but it still provides a reasonably-priced product and hope for many students' dreams and aspirations. Attending a

community college is not a detrimental college choice, nor is a community college an institution that lacks any hopes for a college experience, but the literature shows there is decreased chance of social mobility and upward trajectory. Whether community college choice occurs as a product of reproducing familial habitus or the enrollment occurs because of the funneling of social class, community college are a space where college credit can be gained, as well as a college experience.

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Appendix A

Invitation to participate IRB: 9597

Dear Student,

As a doctoral candidate at the University of Oklahoma, I am conducting a study to explore high achieving students' decision to attend a community college. I am requesting your participation in an interview. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire ahead of time and will have the option of participating in two follow-up semi-structured interview. The first interview will focus on your college choice and the decision to attend Rose State College. The second interview will focus on your experience as a community college student. You may choose to withdraw your participation at any time. During the interview you will select a pseudonym to keep your identity private. The research study may be published, but your real name will not be used.

There are no known risks to participants. The potential benefits of the study is to give you the opportunity to tell about your experience as a highly qualified student.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call the Principal Investigator, Alicia M. McCullar at amccullar@rose.edu [redacted] or the Faculty Supervisor at the University of Oklahoma, Dr. Haslerig haslerig@ou.edu 405-325-4193.

The following link will direct you to the short demographic questionnaire and your submission will indicate your consent and interest in participating in the study. https://rosestatecollege.formstack.com/forms/mccullar_q_2

Your story could make a difference to other highly qualified students approaching college choice. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Alicia M. McCullar
[redacted]
405-733-7371

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire IRB: 9597

This is a study exploring high achieving students' to attend a community college. After completing the demographic questionnaire, I am requesting your participation in an interview. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

During the interview, you will select a pseudonym to keep your identity private. Your information will be private and confidential. The research study may be published but your real name will not be used. There are n known risks of participating. If you have any questions concerning this research study, please contact the Principal Investigator, Alicia M. McCullar at amccullar@rose.edu [redacted] or the Faculty Supervisor at the University of Oklahoma DR. Haslerig haslerig@ou.edu 405-325-4193.

Please indicate parents' or guardians' highest level of education by the start of your first-year of college:

Less than high school
High school
Some college but no degree
Associate's degree
Bachelor's degree
Master's degree
Professional degree
Unknown

Repeat question for parent and/or guardian #1
Repeat question for parent and/or guardian #2
Repeat question for parent and/or guardian #3

Did parent #1 attend a community college?
Yes
No
I do not know
Not applicable

Did parent #2 attend a community college?
Yes
No
I do not know
Not applicable

Did parent #3 attend a community college?

Yes
No
I do not know
Not applicable

Did any older sibling attend a community college?
Yes
No
I do not know
Not applicable

Currently what is your best estimate of your household income?
Less than $24,999
$25,000-$49,999
$50,000-$74,999
$75,000-124,999
$125,000-$199,000
More than $200,000

How many people currently reside in your household?

Are you receiving financial aid or scholarships?
Yes
No

If yes, select all that apply
Student need based
Merit based
Athletic scholarship
Student Loans
Parent Loans
Other Scholarships (Tribal or other 3rd party)

Name the city or town you grew up?

From which high school did you graduate?

Are you student athlete?
Yes
No

What is your current living arrangement?
On campus
Family home
Off campus alone
Off campus with roommates

Off campus with family other than parent/guardian

How do you racially identify?

Gender identity?
Man
Woman

Were you born in the United States?
Yes
No

Your signature below indicates consent to participate. Alicia McCullar will contact you for a follow up interview.

Signature:

Appendix C

College Choice Interview Protocol

1. Can you tell me about your decision to attend Rose State College?

2. What were the most significant factors making your college choice?

3. During high school were you deciding between a few colleges?

    a. Which colleges were included in your search?

    b. What do you think influenced your college choice the most?

4. With your academic profile what do you think you would gain at Rose State College versus being at another institution?

5. Where did you receive the most messaging about going to college?

    a. Did you feel like you were pushed to go to a certain college or university?

    b. After high school, did you feel prepared to go to college?

    c. When do you first start looking at Rose State College as an option?

6. At your high school, tell me about the climate in regards to going to college.

    a. Can you think back to any specific interactions and/or messages that relate to going to college?

    b. What kind of messages did you and your peers receive about preparing for college?

    c. Did any one at your high school suggest a specific college or university to you or your friends?

7. Did anyone try to encourage you or discourage you from attending a community college?

8. Is there any other information you want to share with me about your decision to start at Rose State College?

9. What are your career goals?

    a. Besides yourself, do you feel that anyone in your life influenced or shaped these goals?

10. What impact do you think attending Rose State College will have on your life? How much difference do you think attending another college would have on your life or career goals?
11. Is there anything else you want to add?

*The interviews will be semi-structured. The questions will generally follow the order provided. The sub-questions offer opportunity to gain clarification and allows for expansion of response when needed.

Appendix D

Student Experience Interview Protocol

1. Your first interview your goals were

   _____

   Have those goals changed?

2. Today, we are going to talk more specifically & in depth about your experiences in college over the last several semesters. As we begin, I would like to inquire about your current status in regards to college. Are you a current college student?
   a. Are you still attending Rose State College?
   b. Are you working toward earning an Associate's Degree?
   c. Are you planning on entering the workforce or transfer to another institution?
3. Do you feel connected to Rose State College?
   a. If so, in what ways?
   b. Are there any specifics activities, organizations, or involvement that has influenced this connection?
4. When thinking about your experiences at Rose State College, does it differ from what your expected?
   a. If so in what ways?
5. Can you tell me about your academics since you've started college?
6. How do your academic achievement levels compare with those of your peers?
   a. If there are differences, how did you explain those differences?

7. Were there any significant classroom experiences that stand out in your mind that you may have felt challenged, engaged, or possibly helped you become more interested in the topic?
8. Can you think of an instance in a classroom or other setting you felt compelled to speak or actively participate during college?
9. What do you think has contributed most to your Rose State College experience good or bad?
    a. Can you name some college experiences that have occurred you would consider a success?
    b. Can you name some college experiences that have occurred you would consider a challenge?
    c. When thinking about those challenges what do you think has come from those experiences?
10. Are there any individuals on campus you feel have impacted your experience?
    a. If so, in what ways?
11. Do you feel you have a support system?
    a. If yes, who is the support system?
    b. How has those individuals contributed to your experience?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share about your college experience?
13. Would you choose to attend a community college if you had to do it over again?
14. What advice would you give a high-achieving student that is considering attending a community college?

15. What are plans moving forward?

Appendix E

Constant Comparative Analysis

Start List:

Degree Aspirations
High school influences
Self-efficacy
Goals
Finances
Location

Appendix F

IRB APPROVAL CONTINUING REVIEW: 9597

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Approval of Continuing Review – Expedited Review – AP0

Date: September 03, 2019 **IRB#:** 9597

Principal Investigator: Alicia Michelle McCullar **Approval Date:** 09/03/2019

Study Title: Debunking College Match through Exploration of the Community College Experience

Based on the information submitted, your study is currently: Active, closed to enrollment. On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and approved your continuing review application. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As part of IRB approval, this study has been transitioned to the new requirements under the revised Common Rule. It has been determined that this study now meets the criteria for Exempt Category 2. Please continue to submit Modification and Protocol Deviation forms as needed, and notify the IRB office when this project should be closed by submitting the Exempt Study Closure Report form within iRIS.

Even though future continuing reviews are no longer required for this study, you are reminded that, as principal investigator of this research, it is still your responsibility to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related, per HRPP SOP 407.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- **Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.**

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,



Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix G

IRB APPROVAL INITIAL SUBMISSION: 9597



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Approval of Initial Submission – Expedited Review – AP01

Date: September 12, 2018 **IRB#:** 9597

Principal Investigator: Alicia Michelle McCullar **Approval Date:** 09/12/2018 **Expiration Date: 08/31/2019**

Study Title: Debunking College Match through Exploration of the Community College Experience

Expedited Category: 6 & 7

Collection/Use of PHI: No

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and granted expedited approval of the above-referenced research study. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

NOTE: Please be sure to upload the stamped consent document to the online survey website and to present this information before any demographic questions if you are not including the consent in the recruitment email message.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Promptly submit continuing review documents to the IRB upon notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date indicated above.
- Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,



Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix H: CITI Program Course



CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 30-Aug-2019
Expiration Date 29-Aug-2022
Record ID 31838335

This is to certify that:

Alicia McCullar

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Research (Curriculum Group)
Social Behavioral Modules (Course Learner Group)
3 - Refresher Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of Oklahoma

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wd5a3ab90-b851-4420-8c5f-440eb71e1496-31838335