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A Case Study of Equity and Student Experience in a California Community College

by

Agyeman Siriboe Boateng

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2020

A Case Study of Equity and Student Experience in a California Community College

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by

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This dissertation written by Agyeman Boateng, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

12-17-2019

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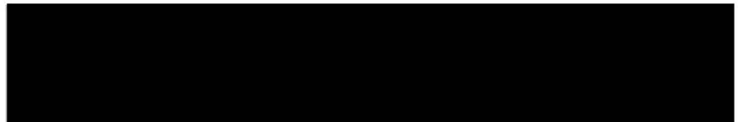

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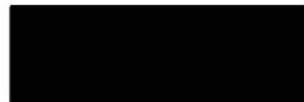

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to acknowledge everyone who helped me, supported me, or gave me advice or a kind word. Thank you.

To the faculty and staff at the School of Education: I wish to thank Dr. McCullough for your encouragement; Dr. Lavadenz for your generosity; Dr. Huchting for your supportive words and actions, especially leading up to my defense; Dr. Reilly for your offering your home, your encouragement, and words of wisdom from before I applied and then throughout my journey to the EdD; Dr. Bickett for your patience and support throughout this journey.

Dr. Baltodano: Thank you for starting this journey with me, helping me to craft this work, and weathering through my early mistakes and missteps. Dr. Sapp: Thank you for shepherding me through each and every step it took to complete this project. To you both: Thank you for your patience, longsuffering, guidance, and support.

To Cohort 12: Thank you for being such a wonderful cohort, an impressive and inspiring group of professionals dedicated to the practice of living out social justice in education. I was very lucky to have met you and to have had the privilege of embarking on this journey with you as colleagues. Thank you to Russell, Didi, and especially Carlos and Fred for your continued encouragement.

Thank you, Nova Meza, Christian Quintero, and Sarah Doerrer, in helping me through the final push in writing. Christian and Sarah, each of you has accompanied me on this journey; I hope you know how much I appreciate you. Thank you for your friendship and camaraderie.

To my colleagues at Pacific, in particular, my supervisor and mentor, my officemates, and my colleagues, who were so supportive, especially those who participated in one way or the

other in this study, whether by helping to recruit students, being interviewed, or lending support, an ear, a shared experience, or comradery.

Michelle Fowles: Thank you for your help and insights in bringing this to a close.

Rebecca Searl: I am eternally grateful.

To the students I interviewed: The value of this study lies in the extent to which it captured and amplified your voices—You surprised me and made me laugh and cry.

To my wife and children, who bore the greatest sacrifice in this endeavor:
I can never thank you enough.

DEDICATION

To Daisy S. Nava

I have failed to live up to what others needed and deserved of me. This work is no exception. What I have learned in this process is that this is who I am: a flawed human being who makes mistakes and falls short, yet has value, and despite my own and others' doubts or judgments, whose contribution also has value. This was also true of you.

The students I met during this project in so many ways reminded me of you.
As this chapter of my life comes to a close, you are the person I want to give this one last gift.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB .... Assembly Bill
ATD .... Achieving the Dream
ASCCC .... Academic Senate for California's Community Colleges
BOG .... Board of Governors
BSI .... Basic Skills Initiative
CCC .... California Community Colleges
CCCCO .... California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office
CCRC .... Community College Resource Center
CRT .... Critical Race Theory
CSU .... California State University
DACA .... Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals
EOPS .... Extended Opportunity Program & Services
ESL .... English as a Second Language
FAFSA .... Free Application for Federal Student Aid
NCES .... National Center for Education Statistics
PTSD .... Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RP .... Research & Practice
SB .... Senate Bill
SEA .... Student Equity and Achievement Plan
SRTK .... Student Right to Know Act
SSSP .... Student Success & Support Program
UC .... University of California

ABSTRACT

Locating Equity in the Student Journey

by

Agyeman Siriboe Boateng

In California community colleges, students of color reach educational milestones and culminating outcomes disproportionately less often than their peers. In the past decade, the state has committed renewed energy to refining student equity plan regulations requiring individual colleges to identify and develop strategies to close such gaps.

This dissertation sought to focus on the intended beneficiaries of these efforts, asking how students themselves define and experience *equity*. Using semistructured, narrative interviews to explore the experiences of nine students of color at a California community college, this qualitative case was supported by institutional documents, participant observation, and interviews with college personnel. This inquiry was conceptually framed by Dowd and Bensimon's (2015) insights on equity's meaning as a standard of justice, California student equity plan success indicators, and Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth.

Students' stories wove tapestries of struggles and triumphs. Their engagement with the college and coursework was often mediated by the external circumstances and internal tumult of their lived experiences and hurdles that derived from college's personnel or processes. Alternately, students found informational, material, social, and motivational resources in their home networks, college programs, relationships with personnel, and their own recognition of personal growth.

Students' experiences with the college denoted equity by its presence and its absence. While affirmatively identifying instances of caring, validation, and growth, less positive experiences revealed the extent to which equity remains aspirational. These findings give voice to the asymmetries between policy/regulatory efforts to redress entrenched educational inequities and the realities of students' lived experience.

Keywords: community colleges, community college students, student experience, equity

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I grew up in Southern California. The majority of students in the schools I attended were the children of working-class, Latinx families. I graduated from my local public high school and left home to begin undergraduate at one of California's prestigious research universities. More than once in my first years there, I wondered about my place and questioned the justice of having that opportunity instead of any other student from my high school. While these musings were fueled in part by self-doubt, they also had to do with my recognition throughout high school and increasingly after entering college of the inherent disconnect between the rhetoric and reality of "equal opportunity" in US society.

I eventually left that first undergraduate institution and attended a nearby community college, where I was inspired by a diverse and hopeful body of students striving for a better future. This scene was familiar and resonant. I saw it as a microcosm of the emerging California, and I saw myself in it and of it. I recognized that as California (and the rest of the nation) became more racially and ethnically diverse, new generations of experts and leaders would need to arise from these diverse communities, attuned to the concerns, needs, and values of the emerging populace.

I remember helping a woman with her writing in a sociology class. She was older than me at the time, perhaps in her 50s, and was an immigrant from Latin America. I remember feeling compelled by the fact that her son was attending the same community college as she was and also by her own determination and resilience to and struggle alongside him. While I had developed some skepticism about "the American Dream," attending that community college

strengthened my sense of "the *California* Dream" and my hope that as a state, we could address fulfilling the promise of a better and more just society for everyone.

Years later, after having lived outside of California, I returned with a family and the hope of contributing to strengthening the institutions that were educating the next generation of Californians. I began working at a community college in southern California at a time when the community college landscape in the state was shifting. In conversations to which I was privy, the notion of *equity* was becoming increasingly prevalent. Some of these conversations were prompted by formal mandates, while others seemed driven by a local desire for increased sensibility and understanding of educational justice. In both cases, I saw in these conversations the effort to work through how the California Dream of my earlier imagination could be achieved: a more just and inclusive society, specifically in and through higher education.

As we discussed how to set institutional goals meant to keep us accountable for helping students achieve their intended objectives (e.g., degree attainment or course success) or debated the best way to include the campus in the development of a student equity plan, I became curious about the space between the parameters of the work with which we, as a campus, were charged; our ideals; and our ability to align the two.

While in the past, I imagined my pursuit of a career in the community colleges as contributing to a grand project of empowerment, much of the narrative around our ability to help students succeed was of our shortcomings. For the most part, students were not succeeding at rates on par with other institutions across the state. Because a majority of the students were Latinx or African American, students of color were disproportionately impacted.

In conversations about these issues, some participants drew attention to the systemic poverty of wealth and resources (including academic) that affected the communities and schools from which many of the students came. Such concerns could be interpreted as recognition that what we could accomplish as an institution was limited in light of forces beyond our control. Comments that highlighted the poverty and segregated, unequal education that affected a sizeable portion of the student population were often—even if we acknowledged the reality of them—seen as diversions or attempts to excuse ourselves from our responsibility as an institution to provide equitable education.

I noticed that although the interests of students were frequently referenced in campus meetings, few of those meetings included meaningful participation or input of students. I must admit that I, as much as anyone else, failed to use the access and influence I possessed to press the issue of including students and their voices in conversations. This study was, to a significant extent, a product of my reflections in and around that moment in my personal and professional development and the context of California community colleges.

Introduction to the Subject

In 1992, the California Community College Board of Governors (BOG) adopted the student equity policy (Guichard, 2000). The policy charged colleges to research—within stated parameters—areas where students were disproportionately impacted in reaching educational milestones and to then create a plan to address the disparities. While the administration of this policy has varied since its founding, in the past decade, student equity has become an unequivocally important component of the policy agenda for community colleges in the state. While the attention to the issue of equity at the state level is laudable, this study explored how

the terms of the policy resonated on the ground with the perspectives of the students it seeks to serve. Questions that motivated this study were: How would students define equity? and: To what extent does student experience resonate with the success indicators the policy asks us to address?

Background of the Problem

Community colleges historically have been situated precariously, in both function and status, between high school and college in the US system of higher education. Ostensibly, early community colleges were intended to provide lower-division college coursework for students (Beach, 2010; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Nevarez & Wood, 2010). As the demand for higher education expanded, community colleges were identified as key institutions for increasing access to such opportunities (Beach, 2010; Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

Although prospective students and the public at large generally perceive community colleges as institutions from which students could transfer to four-year colleges and universities, leaders in higher education, in contrast, have perceived them as institutions that can deliver terminal postsecondary training to the increasing numbers of students who desire but are not capable of earning a four-year degree (Beach, 2010; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Nevarez & Wood, 2010). These contradictory perspectives were embodied to some degree in the California Master Plan for Higher Education (California Department of Education, 1960). The master plan consolidated and defined a three-tiered system of higher education in California, articulated a goal of providing higher education access to a broader population of students, and codified a rigidly stratified system of education (Beach, 2010). Nonetheless, the association that developed between community colleges and the ideal of increasing access to higher education—in

particular the notion of universal access to education—persists in the US psyche as the appellation of “democratic” or “democracy’s colleges” continues to be applied to community colleges.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, community colleges were entering an historic phase in which skepticism about community colleges grew among both policymakers and the public. Policy influencers began scrutinizing the funding and economic efficiency of community colleges, questioning the universal access mission as the student profile continued to change dramatically. This zeitgeist of increasing pressure for evidence of results appeared in educational research and the academy as concern over whether community colleges were ultimately helping or hurting students (Beach, 2010). In this environment, there grew an impetus for states and accrediting agencies to seek ways to implement systems of accountability tied to quantitative metrics (Beach, 2010; Dowd, 2003).

Contemporaneous with this trend was growing awareness of the increasing racial diversity in the United States and community colleges. Concerns about the efficacy of community college for an increasingly diverse student population in California materialized in the inclusion of equity as a pillar in the renewal of the state’s Master Plan for Higher Education (Commission for the Review of the Master Plan for Higher Education [Commission], 1987). In the years that followed the renewal of the plan, the student equity plan regulations were formed to address disparities in student outcomes among racial/ethnic and other groups.

While student equity plan regulation (in this document also referred to as *student equity policy*) was not the only effort made by the state to address issues of student success in community colleges, it was unique among state-mandated California community college

initiatives by centering the notion of equity as opposed to *student success* in general. The student equity policy charges community colleges to investigate institutional metrics in a number of areas pertaining to milestones in a student's progress. Community colleges are required to craft a plan to address disparities in the achievement of those milestones among subgroups of students along demographic lines (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender) or other demarcations of social difference.[1]

Administration of the student equity policy has changed over time; in its early years, no funding was associated with the policy. This eventually changed, and in 2005, every college in the state was held to the requirement. An economic downturn from 2008 to 2012 put enforcement of the policy essentially on hiatus. As the economy recovered, enforcement of the student equity policy was revitalized as part a wave of other reforms aimed at increasing community college completion in the state. In recent years, a new, more aggressive slate of reforms has led to another round of changes in equity policy guidelines for colleges (CCCCO 2019a, CCCCO 2019b, *Community Colleges: Student Success and Support Program Funding*, 2017 [AB 504], Foundation for California's Community Colleges, 2017 [Vision for Success]; *Higher Education Trailer Bill,* 2018 [AB 1809]).

Statement of the Problem

Moore and Shulock's (2010) *Divided We Fail: Improving Completion and Closing Racial Gaps in California's Community Colleges* encapsulated the crisis in completion in California community colleges. Their analysis revealed that six years after initial enrollment, only 31% of students transferred or earned a degree or certificate (Moore & Shulock, 2010).

---

[1] In this decade, students with disabilities, foster youth, and veterans have been added as categories to be examined for equity disparities.

Their study followed cohorts of entering community college students, tracking completion metrics and other milestones that pave the way to completion, such as attaining 30 course credits or persistence over multiple semesters. Only 15% of students followed in the study were still enrolled after six years, suggesting the majority of California community college students dropped out of higher education within six years of starting. Of additional concern was the general theme that African American and Latinx students achieved completion and milestones toward completion at significantly and consistently lower rates than their peers did.

In their *Unrealized Promises* study, Martinez-Wenzl and Marquez (2012) highlighted another dimension to the issue of lower chances of African American and Latinx completion. Their study analyzed transfer outcomes in relation to the racial and ethnic composition of high schools and community colleges. They found community colleges with larger proportions of Black and Latinx students also serve larger proportions of “students from weak high schools” (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012, p. 6), and most of the community colleges with the lowest rates of transfer were “either majority underrepresented minority or intensely segregated” (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012, p. 6).

The study also found community colleges with larger proportions of White and Asian students had correspondingly larger proportions of “students from strong high schools” (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012, p. 6), and the colleges with the highest rates of transfer had majorities of White and Asian students (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012). Yet even these high-performing colleges were found to have racial disparities in transfer rate (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012). Furthermore, Martinez-Wenzl and Marquez found, “There is some evidence to suggest community college students without a credential find their education has little

currency in the labor market," as their earnings are on par with high school graduates (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012, p. 9). Ultimately, these broad trends translate into differences in opportunity and livelihood for individual students, depending at least somewhat on their demographics.

Equivocal meaning of equity. In higher education, particularly in community colleges, the concept of equity has come to indicate the cause of redressing achievement gaps between racial, ethnic, and other populations in educational outcome rates—particularly in achievement of an associate's degree or certificate or transfer to a four-year institution (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Dowd, 2007; Lester, 2014). Efforts such as California's student equity policy nominally represent system-wide commitment to address the decreased likelihood of students from historically marginalized groups in achieving goal-related outcomes, such as transfer. Here, equity refers to *outcome equity:* parity in the demographic distribution of the inputs (demographic makeup of students) and outputs (demographic makeup of completers) of the educational process (Dowd, 2003; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015).

In their work, Dowd and Bensimon (2015) promoted a broader frame for equity in higher education, arguing quantitative measures of equity are not enough to achieve educational justice. The authors said equity refers to "a standard for judging whether a state of affairs is just or unjust" (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 9). They drew attention to the potential in the term equity for both broad and narrow interpretation and application; the term "means different things to different people" (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 9). Therefore, "lack of shared understanding of what equity means [is a] major impediment" to addressing educational injustice (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 10). Disparities in student outcomes, they asserted, are products of racial

inequality generated and reproduced in the institutions and structures of education and society, in the making long before students set foot on a community college campus. The flexibility in meaning inherent in the use of this multivalent term, equity, can therefore lead to misunderstanding and even subtle elisions that facilitate silence on issues of institutional racism.

Efforts to address student success. For nearly three decades, California has implemented a number of policy and programmatic efforts aimed at increasing the success of community college students. Among these, the student equity policy specifically requires colleges to develop and evaluate plans to address disparities in educational outcomes among various groups in California community colleges. Scholars, such as Levin (2007a), have been critical of systems of accountability. Levin (2007a) regarded accountability policies' frequent focus on quantitative measures of progress as evidence of the supplanting of academic culture with corporate culture and believed practitioners can "transcend [these policies] when they view and treat students not as economic or even institutional entities, but as individuals with agency and as members of a democratic society" (p. 489).

More attention has been paid in recent years to the extent to which students' lives are fraught with challenges, and colleges often deliver education and training without consideration of factors that can hinder student learning and engagement. While the negative consequences of inequitable community college outcomes have been often couched in the future health of the state's workforce and/or economy (Moore & Shulock, 2010), the negative impacts of low college completion rates are most directly felt by the students who do not make it through their programs (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012).

While it is reasonable and laudable that the state should maintain a systematic policy with the aim to eliminate achievement gaps, Dowd and Bensimon (2015) and Levin (2007a) have highlighted how systems of accountability may not be equipped to fully deliver social justice. For Dowd and Bensimon (2015), focusing on achievement gaps alone may leave examination of institutional biases, along with students' experience of institutional and structural oppression out of the picture. Similarly, for Levin (2007a), education cannot become more just and democratic without humanizing students and practitioners as having agency and providing space for the discussion, articulation, and application of justice-oriented values.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how a social justice imperative was understood, engaged, and reflected at a community college. This dissertation investigated students' experiences and understandings about equity in light of the metrics—representative of milestones of student progress—that are features of the California Community College student equity policy. The student equity policy frames student success in several ways: (a) it employs a definition of equity as outcome equity (i.e., mathematical parity in student outcome rates among various demographic categories); (b) it asserts a particular partitioning of student experience: access, course completion, basic skills, and English as a second language (ESL) progression, degree and certificate completion, and transfer; and (c) by requiring individual colleges to create equity plans, it signals the importance of institutional context for redressing educational inequity. Thus, for this study, the student equity policy served as a point of interest around which to organize broader critical conversations happening in the community college setting about how to strive for ideals of justice.

This study did not intend to evaluate the implementation or efficacy of the student equity policy in general or the equity plan as it is specifically practiced. This study delimited the scope of this interest by honing in on the meaning of equity in a particular college context and on the direct experience of students, choosing to explore this interest using qualitative methods. These choices were made with the foreknowledge that (a) equity may take on many meanings; (b) community colleges engage in myriad efforts intended to redress inequities; (c) the experience and notions of policymakers, institutional agents, and those of students may be unique and dissimilar from each other; and (d) context is vital for understanding.

Despite a number of initiatives and policies over the decades, such as the California student equity policy, disparities in student outcomes persist. Thus, this study sought to understand students' experiences and perceptions of equity and the apparent challenges and opportunities for the college. Strategies to improve the extent to which students may benefit from such policies may be hindered by what is not seen by those who design and execute those strategies. Inquiry into the experience and understanding of students has the potential to make visible what policymakers and institutional agents have been obscured from seeing—and what they may avoid, ignore, or overlook. For the sake of students' wellbeing, it is important to document and address areas where policies and actions meant to remedy injustice are misaligned with pertinent realities and limiting factors. Thus, this study aimed to be a conduit for the voices of the students who participated and for others who shared their experiences and insights and to contribute to the awareness of policymakers and practitioners.

Research Question

Because progress toward equity requires understanding student experiences, this study investigated the following question: In light of the goals of the California student equity policy, how do students in the context of a particular community college define and experience equity?

Conceptual Framework

This study sought to triangulate students' experiences with the concerns suggested in the terms of the California student equity policy, while opening space for a broader construction of the meaning of equity. To guide the research toward this aim, three frameworks were instrumental in the development, analysis, and interpretation conducted in this study.

The first pillar of the conceptual framework included the metrics outlined in the student equity policy interpretively as reference points to tie milestones of student experience back to the policy in the design of the study. As the second pillar, I chose Dowd and Bensimon's (2015) framework of *equity as a standard* to accommodate a variety of conceptions of equity as used in higher education, including, but not limited to, instrumental definitions as are employed in accountability measures, such as the student equity policy. For the third pillar, Yosso's (2005) framework of *community cultural wealth* was instrumental in interpreting student experience in counterpoint to the other pillars.

Student Equity Policy

The five success indicators in the following list organize the California student equity policy (CA Education Code Section 54220) and represent various aspects of community college students' navigation through higher education and their academic progress:

1. Access: opportunity and entry into college,

2. Course completion: passing courses with a C or better,
3. English as a second language and basic skills progression: progress through remedial course sequences into college-level courses,
4. Degree and certificate completion, and
5. Transfer to four-year institutions. (Guichard, 1992)

These metrics represented the areas of student interaction with the college with respect to equity, as delineated by the student equity policy, and comprised one basis for conceptualizing spheres of the student/institution relationship salient to the question of equity for data inquiry, organization, and interpretation in this study.

Equity as a Standard

The study also adopted Dowd and Bensimon's (2015) framework of equity as a standard to organize and interpret data. Citing scholarly perspectives on theories of justice, Dowd and Bensimon (2015) identified three standards for justice evoked by the term equity: (a) *justice as fairness*, (b) *justice as care*, and (c) *justice as transformation*.

The standard of justice as fairness is associated with notions stemming from social contract theory of equal opportunities and rights which, the authors claimed, dominate and have dominated discussions about justice among educational policymakers and practitioners for decades and continue to do so (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Under this standard, equity may be measured by comparing outcomes of education and may be resolved by providing more resources to students most in need of assistance.

Justice as care refers to the idea that achieving equity requires attending to the emotional and relational condition of students. Dowd and Bensimon (2015) referenced several ideas,

including Noddings' (1999) articulation of *care* in the context of equity, which asserts students' rights to self-respect, feeling cared for, and having their needs attended to. Another vein supporting this standard is *validation theory*, as offered by Rendón (1994), which theorizes the relationships between students and institutional agents, particularly the educator's active role in promoting inclusion and honoring student voices and backgrounds.

Finally, the authors' notion of justice as transformation particularly draws upon *critical race theory* (CRT). Critical race theory represents a movement of scholars critical of liberal ideas, such as equality and meritocracy, articulated in the context of education. Ladson-Billings (1998) and Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) have "view[ed] persistent racial inequalities in educational participation and outcomes as evidence of institutional and structural racism" (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 15). This standard calls upon practitioners to "change institutional practices and structures that are discriminatory" (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 15).

Community Cultural Wealth

This study also relied on Yosso's (2005) ideas about understanding the previously overlooked and undertheorized resources available to students of color as they navigate higher education. Yosso's work was in response to academic discussions of nonmaterial resources students use in higher education and society, theorized by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) as the notion of *capital.*

In higher education specifically, Bourdieu and Passeron argued educational institutions protected and reproduced class relations in part by participants' regulation and conservation of social and cultural knowledge, skills, values, habits, tastes, etc. An individual's success in higher education, they theorized, is largely predicated on the ability to wield *cultural capital*, which is

acquired in the socialization of the upper class. Meanwhile, the ideology of meritocracy covers up this reproduction of status, such that processes of inclusion and exclusion inherent in the educational system that conserve class status pose as neutral and fair arbiters of social mobility.

Following other authors who worked to elaborate on Bourdieu and Passeron's theories, Yosso (2005) invoked a CRT perspective to consider the experiences of students of color. Yosso observed previous interpretations of capital in higher education had assumed students of color, having less exposure to the dominant, White, middle- and upper-class culture, were bereft of social or cultural resources when they began college. Yosso argued the cultures of students of color indeed have value and that students of color have access to various forms of capital—aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant—that derive from their communities of origin. Yosso's framework, *community cultural wealth*, is important for this study because it provides a lens that reinforces value in students' stories that may be missed and mitigates latent assumptions of deficit at play in higher education settings (Yosso, 2005).

Methodology

Merriam (1998) wrote the primary trait of qualitative research is its concern with "understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 6). Given this study's interest in meaning, experience, and context, I investigated the central research question by conducting a qualitative case study of Pacific College (Pacific), a community college in urban southern California.

With an annual enrollment of 15,000 students (at the inception of this study), Pacific College is one of several schools in a large, multicampus district in southern California. Over 70% of its enrollment is made up of students of color. Nearly 43% of Pacific's students are

Latinx, which matches the state proportion of Latinx community college students; however, 27% of Pacific's students are African American, which is higher than the statewide proportion of 6.4%.

I collected data between August 2017 and August 2018 through a process that included interviews, document review, and participant observation. I administered semistructured interviews to query five college personnel (faculty, staff, or administrators) involved in efforts to improve student success at Pacific and nine students. I also reviewed institutional documents, such as the college equity plan, the state equity plan template, and the educational master plan, and observed as a participant selected meetings pertaining to equity and student success.

My analysis of these data sources initially used in vivo coding (identifying what was being said in a segment of text) and open-thematic procedures (identifying themes), followed by grouping the codes identified in open coding for analysis. Several strategies were employed to enhance the rigor, trustworthiness, and reliability of the research, including (a) prolonged engagement in the research setting, (b) the use of a field journal, (c) the triangulation of data sources, and (d) peer debriefing.

Significance

One of the most important contributions of this study is it amplifies the voices of the students whom the California student equity policy intends to benefit. Community colleges should be oriented toward student and community needs, which is not possible if these needs are not voiced or heard. This is even more critical for minoritized students who are vulnerable to structural and institutional racism in seemingly neutral community college policies and practices.

Through this study, themes of equity and accountability relevant to discussions of policy, practice, and theory can be put into perspective given the realities of students' ideas and experiences of community college. In the broadest sense, this study sought to contribute to the literature and discussion on social justice theory and its applications. At the local level, exploring the perhaps obscured or unsurfaced meanings of equity based in students' notions and experiences can help clarify shared values and guide efforts to increase student success and ultimately educational justice. In these ways, findings from this case study may also provide insight into the dynamics of equity at other campuses. Educational leaders may use the findings and insights of this study to address issues that may be hidden in the colleges, districts, and systems they lead to better align their institutions values and actions.

Dowd and Bensimon (2015) argued, "It will not be possible through technical control to address the histories of colonization, subordination, oppression, and the unjust exercise of power in domination of people of color on a global scale" (pp. 171-172). Institutions truly committed to taking institutional responsibility for just policies and practices must give voice to students' experiences and become aware of how they define equity, especially in light of their experiences. Furthermore, as Dowd and Bensimon (2015) wrote, "The accountability field's discourse of data use, accountability, and performance indicators influences whose voice is heard and viewed as authoritative and whose is not" (p. 171). Privileging student voices, therefore, is one way to counteract the reduction of student experience that accountability measures often produce. Heeding this insight is crucial to the need for community college leaders to take social justice seriously as part of their ethical, professional, and societal responsibility.

Limitations and Delimitations

The study was framed in terms of the California student equity plan success metrics. This delimitation may have obscured or de-emphasized other dynamics relevant to the research; thus, in the move to narrow the focus of the research, potentially narrowing possible truths relevant to the larger issue of equity that motivated the study.

As a member of the staff at Pacific College, there was risk of researcher bias. Particularly, the study called for the critical analysis of aspects of the case study context that involved myself or my close colleagues, to varying degrees, as participants in initiatives involving student success and equity at the institution. As my position was more colleague facing than student facing, my proximity to the institution and relative distance from the students introduced risk of bias. The research, arguably, is limited by the extent to which rapport could be established with the community of interest (the students) in this research, and the extent to which my efforts to mitigate my bias as a community member of the institutional setting of the study were successful.

One limitation of the study in its conclusion was the weakness in representation of the African-American perspective among the participants and an overall dearth of analysis of race. Ultimately, the skill, experience, and execution of the researcher constitutes a potential limitation of any research, especially qualitative research.

Definition of Terms

Equity

Equity is a term that has increased in usage in higher education and community college discourse in the past few decades. While the term once was used to more broadly refer to liberal

democratic or social justice aims associated with access to community college (Dowd, 2003; Bailey & Morest, 2006), efforts to focus policy attention on the goal of "equal outcomes on average for different socioeconomic groups" (Dowd, 2003, p. 112) have been fairly successful. California policy that directs community colleges to address the issue of equity specifically has defined equity in this such way, with the essential goal of reducing differences in student outcome metrics (e.g., degree completion, transfer, among others; Nguyen, Skeen, Mize, Navarette, & McElhinney, 2015). Dowd and Bensimon (2015) provided a definition of equity that encompasses this along with other aspects of justice beyond statistical parity in outcomes. For this study, the meaning of equity relied on Dowd and Bensimon's (2015) ideas while also leaving open for investigation how equity may be understood by students in the context of a specific institution, Pacific College.

California Student Equity Policy

The California student equity plan regulations (CA Education Code Section 54220) require all state community colleges to research whether gaps in institutional metrics (called *success indicators)* exist among particular student populations and to create and evaluate equity plans to address the gaps found. State enforcement and provision of accompanying resources had been inconsistent until 2013, at which time the policy was renewed and tied to a funding source (Nguyen et al., 2015). Since then, the administrative guidelines of the policy have been modified more as the landscape of policy priorities have shifted.

Equity Plan

Under the California student equity policy, an equity plan is a written strategy that identifies goals and activities a college will undertake to address identified gaps for

disadvantaged or vulnerable student populations in their access to college, course completion rates, basic skills, math, English, or ESL progression, rates of degree or certificate completion, and rates of transfer to a four-year institution.

Equity as a Standard

Dowd and Bensimon (2015) suggested equity is most frequently used to denote some standard of justice, which in higher education environments often means one of three things: (a) *fairness*, which is associated with rights students have to something (educational outcomes, services, instruction); (b) *care,* which refers to the relationship between students and representatives (and, perhaps also, representations) of the institution; and (c) *transformation,* which refers to the need to combat systemic issues that cause gaps, and the insidious ways in which practices and policies may generate and perpetuate gaps.

Success Indicators

Success indicators are the metrics in the California student equity policy that colleges are required to research to identify gaps among any number of designated socioeconomic and status subgroups (the subgroups include minoritized racial and ethnic group designations such as "Black or African American," "Hispanic or Latino," and over time have come to include other groups, such as veterans, homeless students, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender students. The success indicators at the study's initiation were (a) access, (b) course completion, (c) ESL and basic skills progression, (d) degree and certificate completion, and (d) transfer. The policy requires colleges to create goals and plans to improve student success for subgroups where disproportionate impact—outcome rates that fail to meet a standard of sufficient parity with higher performing groups—is found.

Organization of Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what equity means at a California community college. More specifically, this study investigated what students say equity means in light of their experiences, taking into account institutional perspectives. The study was also concerned with gauging student, staff, faculty, and administrator impressions of the state of equity and its prospects on the campus.

Chapter 1 introduced this study, outlining the background and problem, purpose, conceptual framework, methodology, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 explicates the conceptual framework of this study and its theoretical underpinnings, analyzes literature regarding the characteristics and development of the community college and the concept of equity in light of the completion agenda, and then describes the characteristics and development of California community colleges and California student equity policy. Chapter 3 provides the rationale and description of the research design and methods used to investigate the study's research question. Chapter 4 conveys the findings organized by analytic themes, highlighting as evidence the voices of the student participants. Chapter 5 discusses what conclusions might be drawn from the study's findings pertaining to the research question, possible implications of the findings, and recommendations and directions that future research might take.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Community colleges are institutions that can be seen in a variety of ways depending on what lens, critiques, and values one brings to the viewing. They have multifaceted missions and serve a variety of functions to their communities. Community colleges serve a role in US society by supporting values of lifelong learning, educational opportunity, and the democratization of education. Critics have argued these promises ring hollow when most students do not achieve their educational goals. Consequently, such arguments imply, community colleges perform an insidious, latent function of protecting elite educational spaces from masses of nontraditional and less advantaged individuals that desire upward mobility by prolonging their route or filtering them out of higher education entirely (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

In the state of California, junior colleges developed alongside elite notions about the proper role and sites of advanced education and other types of training. A vision of community colleges as sites where all freshman- and sophomore-level work would occur in the service of further elevating the status of universities was not entirely realized. Nevertheless, the idea of community colleges as preparatory schools for third-year college study remained prominent even as community colleges took on (by opportunity or design) lower status educational functions, such as vocational training, remedial education, and other community education functions, including adult and civic/citizenship education.

As college populations have ballooned over the decades, community colleges have multiplied, blossomed, and diversified, and the extent to which nontraditional and minority students proliferated in these institutions grew. The tensions inherent in the ideal, perceived, and

actual functions of the college, the large student volume, low ascribed status, and low resource provision were inscribed into their systematization in California.

As community college leaders plan for the future of California higher education, the idea of eliminating discrepancies in community college outcomes for students of color and other traditionally marginalized populations have coalesced in calls and policies designed for equity. By the early 1990s, California community colleges were officially required to develop plans to eliminate these discrepancies; however, the enforcement and administration of this policy—which have provided colleges a large degree of autonomy—have ebbed and flowed as conditions affecting state policy and administration changed. In this past decade, state policymakers have made another push to focus colleges on the question of equity aligned with other student success initiatives.

While equity has been defined by legislation and policy guidelines, this research sought to shift focus to the context and understandings of the presumed beneficiaries of these policies: the students. More broadly, this study was concerned with bringing a clearer focus to the question of equity in a California community college as it pertains to the student experience.

Conceptually, this research proceeded by acknowledging the provided framework of student activities implied by the outcomes the student equity policy seeks to improve (a) access to college, (b) passing courses, (c) (when applicable) transitioning from precollege-level to college-level work, and (d) obtaining a degree or transferring to a four-year institution.

In this chapter, I drew from the literature to provide context for this study, particularly equity in the community college arena. This review begins by providing an explication of the three theoretical and conceptual concepts that framed this study, namely:

- Dowd and Bensimon's (2015) tripartite explication of equity as a standard for justice, which is an amalgam of several traditions of theorizing justice and which includes consideration of the ways in which equity, as deployed in education, may refer to notions of fairness, caring, belonging, and validation, or to notions of transformation of institutionalized and systemic inequalities;
- The framework of California student equity policy success metrics for enumerating the loci of student/college engagement salient to equity policy in the context of California community colleges; and
- Yosso's (2005) conception of community cultural wealth for processing student experience of higher education, which provides a framework for recognizing the complexity and value of that student experience as they pursue higher learning in engagement with their college.

Next, I will describe the history, institutional structure, and characteristics of the community college, and then proceed to provide background on California community colleges in particular. Following this contextual information, I will delve further into the state's concern with equity in its community colleges, focusing on the California community college student equity policy, which requires every community college in California to create a plan that identifies and addresses equity gaps—areas where students in a particular group achieve positive outcomes at a notably lower rate than a comparison group. This discussion will include the manner in which equity had been articulated as an essential feature of the vision for community colleges at the time of the policy's creation in the late 1980s and early 1990s and an outline of policy content itself.

Conceptual Framework

This study's approach sought to conceptually reconcile key phenomena of interest in the research question (a) community college success metrics, (b) equity, and (c) student experience. The equity plan success indicator categories provided a framework of measurable outcomes articulated in the data having to do with student experiences, as well as college activities, particularly in the context of California community colleges. Dowd and Bensimon's (2015) equity as a standard framework provided a lens through which equity could be interpreted, particularly in educational settings. While the letter of the California student equity policy suggested a fairness concept of equity, as it sought proportional parity in rates of success among societally disadvantaged subgroups of students and their peers, members of an institution may understand and enact equity in different ways. A fundamental presumption of this study was this interplay. To mediate that interplay with the student experience, Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth was employed as a third component of the conceptual framework. The following sections provide descriptions of these frameworks, which, in their intersection, provide the conceptual approach of this study.

Student Equity Policy

The California Community College BOG student equity policy directed colleges to research and create plans to decrease disparate impacts on student success found along two dimensions: (a) success indicators and (b) categories of difference (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, among others). The student equity policy success indicators were (a) access, (b) course completion, (c) ESL and basic skills completion, (d) degrees and certificates, and (e) transfer. As a student equity policy success metric, access refers to the population makeup of the school in

comparison to that of the area the college intended to serve. More broadly conceived, access may refer to student awareness, application, and matriculation into the college. Course completion pertains to the successful passing (with a C or better) of coursework. Developmental math, English, and ESL refer to student progression from below-college-level (remedial) coursework to college-level coursework in English and math, which may have included ESL coursework. The categories of degree or certificate completion and transfer refer to outcomes that indicate completion of community college work.

The student equity policy has also identified the minimal populations to address, along racial/ethnic lines (with disaggregation of American Indians or Alaskan natives, Asians or Pacific Islanders, Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites), gender identification, and persons with disabilities. In recent years other groups of interest, such as foster youth and veterans, have been identified (Nguyen et al., 2015). This study prioritized focus on equity for the two largest racial/ethnic populations of students at Pacific College, African American/Black and Latinx students, while not precluding the salience of other categories of difference that may have emerged from the research.

Equity as a Standard of Justice

Dowd and Bensimon (2015) highlighted the term equity often “means different things to different people” (p. 9). The authors proposed, “Equity is a standard for judging whether a state of affairs is just or unjust” (p. 9). In higher education settings, they posited, the term is often associated with the notion of equal opportunity, which curtails more nuanced conceptions of justice (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 9). More pointedly, they observed, equity is used generally

to mean fairness while avoiding the potential reactions (e.g., fear and defensiveness) that a term like *racism* might provoke.

Drawing broadly from literature on standards of justice, Dowd and Bensimon (2015) framed and deployed three modes of equity as a standard of justice they argued should more explicitly inform accountability policy in higher education: (a) justice as fairness, (b) justice as care, and (c) justice as transformation.

Justice as fairness. Dowd and Bensimon (2015) drew upon the work of Rawls (1971) and the principle of equal rights to identify this interpretation of equity. The notion of justice as fairness, explicitly introduced by Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* is one of the dominant liberal theories in education (Blackmore, 2013b). Building upon classic philosophers of social contract theory, such as John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant, Rawls (1971, as cited in Blackmore, 2013a) developed a theory of justice based upon the principles that "all people are free and equal" (p. 1002), and the *difference principle*, which directs that decisions should be made to maximize the benefit to the least advantaged in a society (Blackmore, 2013a).

Dowd and Bensimon (2015) identified particular components of Rawls' (1971) framework in their discussion of justice as fairness. Foremost are the concepts of *horizontal equity*, the idea that equivalent resources should be granted to those with equivalent needs, and *vertical equity*, the idea that more resources should be granted to those with more need. As a corollary to vertical equity, they identified the principles of outcome equity and *adequacy* (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Outcome equity is fundamental to equity policies that use the outcomes of education as the standard to judge fairness. In practice, outcome equity is in contradistinction to notions of fairness based on equality of inputs. Adequacy refers to the obligation of societies to

"provide adequate resources to educate all students at a minimum threshold level" (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 11).

Blackmore (2013a) noted Rawls' (1971) theories are related to the "balance between liberty and equality" in a democracy (p. 1002). Rawls' ideas also attempted to balance the foundations of liberal thought with the social imperatives of the time in which he wrote. The struggles for civil rights, including civil unrest and reactive backlash, that challenged US democracy to confront its injustice, contrasts with the abstract approach Rawls used to derive the theory, even as it "sought to elaborate within liberal theory the principle of distributive justice" (Blackmore, 2013a, p. 1002). Feminist philosophers and other critics have charged that Rawls' theory is "hypothetical and ahistorical" (Blackmore, 2013a, p. 1003) and thus blind to how injustice may persist even if nominally bestowed rights are approximately equal (Nussbaum, as cited in Blackmore, 2013a).

Justice as care. Noddings (1999) situated the problem of achieving equity as beyond questions of fairness and rights. Noddings warned remedies limited to resolving injustice only as it pertains to fairness and rights are incomplete since they frequently are formulaic, often leaving a number of unjust conditions unresolved all the while blaming this lack of resolution on faulty implementation (Noddings, 1999). Such solutions solve the problem in theory but promise "an outcome, higher achievement, that [they] cannot produce" (Noddings, 1999, p. 12).

Noddings' ethic of care. Noddings (1999) proposed equity must also take the form of care. This would entail a *moral orientation* with three components: (a) receptivity (being receptive to the needs of the cared for), (b) motivational displacement (directing energy toward those needs), and (c) "completion in the *cared for*" (p. 16, emphasis added). For Noddings

(1999), in the context of equity, caring in this sense (rather than the colloquial sense) "refers properly to the relation, not just an agent who 'cares'" (p. 13). Adequate care necessitates "responding to their needs and interests [and] must consider the response for the cared-for" (Noddings, 1999, pp. 12-13). Formulaic remedies based on sameness of rights for all fail to truly achieve equity because they "cannot compensate for losses of identity, group respect, and community feeling" (Noddings, 1999, p. 12).

Rendón's validation theory. Dowd and Bensimon (2015) also identified the work of Rendón (1994) as resonant with the ethic of care as a standard for justice. Rendón (1994), in an analysis of 132 interviews of first-year college students identified that many of them, particularly nontraditional students, needed validation. Rendón's notion of validation is distinct from involvement—a notion predicated upon the student's prerogative to act (to be involved) while positioning the college as passive space where resources and opportunities for involvement are provided. Rendón's conception of validation was relational, requiring institutional agents to act.

Rendón (1994) identified several qualities of validation. Validation is "an enabling, confirming and supportive process" (p. 44) that promotes "academic and interpersonal development" (p. 44) in the student. Importantly, however, validation is "initiated by in-and out-of-class agents" (p. 44), which is to say, institutional agents must be active to promote validation in curricular and co-curricular contexts. Evidence of validation manifests as students' feelings: They are "capable of learning [and in possession of] a feeling of self-worth . . . that they, and everything that they bring to the college experience, are accepted and recognized as valuable" (Rendón, 1994, p. 44).

According to Rendón (1994), student development requires validation as a precondition. Validation is salient to the student's life and can occur in class, out of class, by faculty, by counselors, by classmates, by family, by friends, and by significant others. It "suggests a developmental process," and enriches the student's experience both academically and interpersonally (Rendón, 1994, p. 44). Finally, Rendón (1994) suggested validation is most powerful early in the student's college experience.

Justice as transformation. Of the three ways in which equity is often evoked as a standard of justice, Dowd and Bensimon (2015) proclaimed the conception justice as transformation was the motivating force of their work. Justice as transformation drew heavily from CRT as applied to education. Key to Dowd and Bensimon's (2015) articulation of justice as transformation is the stance from CRT that "view[s] persistent racial inequalities in educational participation and outcomes as evidence of institutional and structural racism" (p. 15). The authors argued adopting this perspective of justice as transformation in the vein of CRT is critical to move toward educational justice.

Critical race theory. Scholarly summaries of CRT have described it alternately as a movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and a perspective (Chapman, Dixson, Gilborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2013). Critical race theory refers to a framework for analyzing society that centers race and to the scholars and activists who work with this framework to critique and combat racial injustice. Its origins were in legal studies: Derrick Bell, Patricia Williams, Richard Delgado, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and other scholars developed theoretical tools to address aspects of racial injustice that other perspectives, such as critical legal studies, had trouble revealing or critiquing with satisfaction (Chapman et al., 2013). Scholars working in a variety of disciplinary

perspectives have adopted and developed CRT; among them, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) articulated the framework for scholarship in education.

As Chapman et al. (2013) noted, "There is no single canonical statement of CRT [because] the perspective is built upon a series of key insights which are constantly refined through their application analytically and practically" (p. 1020). Every articulation of CRT centers the importance of race and racism. The variety in how CRT is described is likely because CRT is comprised of a network of corollary critical concepts that can be discussed with varying emphases. For the sake of this discussion, I will introduce several key concepts in the context of CRT's critique of liberalism.

Critical race theory as a critique of liberalism. Zamudio, Russell, Rios, and Bridgeman (2011) characterized liberalism as a centuries-old project of Western European culture, originating in the Enlightenment era, which equated (or conflated) rights of individuals with property rights. The ideas of "equality, freedom, individual rights, and meritocracy" (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011, p. 15) were instrumental in overthrowing Western European monarchies and undergirding the societies that would eventually become today's "modern capitalist democracies" (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 15), and, Zamudio et al. (2011) pointed out, "From the very beginning, liberal societies were constructed along the status lines of class, race, gender, and citizenship" (p. 16).

Thus, the focus on race and racism in CRT goes beyond a recognition of their presence, and is also an "[acknowledgement of] the endemic nature of racism in America and how it permeates every social system in this country whether political, legal, or educational" (Patton, Harper, & Harris, 2015, p. 195). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) referred to the way in which

racism is a banal part of everyday life and thus, in its *ordinariness*, can remain unacknowledged and often becomes difficult to explicitly point out. When the deep-rootedness of racism is considered in terms of the system of rights, which conflate the rights of individuals and property, another fundamental concept of CRT is the notion of *Whiteness as property,* which may manifest as license to impose cultural norms, use societal resources and enjoy privileges, embody status and reputation, and exclude others from all of the above (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In light of this, CRT scholars have also critiqued apparent legal victories in civil rights as inherently limited in their ability to advance racial justice. The CRT notion of *interest convergence* refers to the observation that forward progress in racial equality requires there be some benefit to powerful or elite Whites (Chapman et al., 2013).

More specific to CRT's critique of liberalism is its critique of some of the ideologies fundamental to liberal society, particularly in regard to education in contemporary Western society. Under a CRT analysis, meritocracy, neutrality, objectivity, and color-blindness are oppressive constructs that uphold liberalism's myth of "inequality as a natural product of fair competition" (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 16). One effect of this is the way the material reality of education reveals as evident structural inequalities in resources, opportunities, processes, and outcomes, while the redress of those inequalities is deemed off limits by a legal system built on individual rights (Zamudio et al., 2011).

Additionally, the CRT-relevant concept of *intersectionality* refers to the ways in which various forms of oppression, such as those based in gender, physical ability, or sexuality, interlace in society and experience, and become obscured when looking at inequality through categories of difference as distinct, hierarchical, or simply overlapping. Critical race theory

advocates for the use of storytelling encourage the "naming of one's own reality" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 56) to highlight "the experiential knowledge of people of color" (Chapman et al., 2013, p. 1021), using their counter stories to combat oppressive narratives and heal the impact of these narratives to their own psyches (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Justice as transformation and critical race theory. In their exposition of justice as transformation, Dowd and Bensimon (2015) did not explicitly draw upon every aspect of CRT discussed above. The authors began their discussion of justice as transformation by centering racism and its pervasiveness and reproduction in the educational system. They also referenced the critique of liberalism, particularly how "the dominant themes of democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility" (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 15) may render racial injustice invisible to those who uncritically accept the "majoritarian' master narrative" (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 15) and thereby blame the oppressed for inequalities in educational outcomes.

Dowd and Bensimon (2015) made a point to highlight the notions of structural racism—the societal stratification in access to education along racial and ethnic lines that reproduces inequality—and institutional racism, the "seemingly objective standards of academic life that are racialized, because they take their existing form due to historical racial discrimination and contemporary amnesia about race policy" (p. 15). For these scholars, justice as transformation relates to an acknowledgment of structural and institutional racism, and the identification of responsibility by institutional agents "to change institutional practices and structures that are discriminatory" (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 15).

Community cultural wealth. While the frameworks discussed so far provide guideposts for thinking about how equity is conceived of, discussed, and parameterized in community college policy, scholarship, and professional practice, this study was interested in investigating what meaning may be made of equity in the context of students' experiences. Yosso (2005) used CRT to develop a language for describing the knowledge, tools for navigating the world, and other resources students of color bring to their college experiences. Yosso's innovation was to bring a CRT critique and corrective to what had become a conventional approach to understanding what social, cultural, and other resources students bring to college; the notion of capital introduced by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) initially focused on various mechanisms of mobility in a society and the extent to and means by which class origin overwhelmingly influence success in educational institutions (Davies & Rizk, 2018). A key element of their argument was that educational institutions protect existing class structures and dominance by privileging culture in a very broad sense, to include not just knowledge, values, and tastes, but embodied habits, gestures, ways of speaking, and moving about the world. Students who grow up in upper class households enter school equipped with the styles and understandings needed to navigate the systems and succeed. Furthermore, while elite institutions inculcate the development of such style and understanding, the ideology of meritocracy, in effect, projects a narrative of this process as being neutral and fair to all.

Davies and Rizk (2018) credit scholars such as Paul DiMaggio (1982) and Annette Laurea (2000) for having influenced US understanding of cultural capital by focusing on the correlation between participation in *high culture* activities and school success and the advantages

wealthier families gained by engaging with the school implicitly (by adopting "practices [aligned with] school reward systems") (Davies & Rizk, 2018, p. 339) and explicitly through involvement in school activities or mimicking school practices at home. As Davies and Rizk (2018) summarized, use of the concept migrated beyond Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) initial emphasis on dominant elite culture and institutions. Emphasizing local context and micro-level interactions and rituals, Collins (2004) atomized the concept, seeing cultural capital as, "any stock of symbols that facilitates interaction in any group" (Davies & Rizk, 2018, p. 340). Over the past two decades, in congruence with the Collins' (2004) interpretation of cultural capital, a newer wave of scholarship subsequently explored, "variations in cultural capital by gender, race, and class" (Davies & Rizk, 2018, p. 346). As a contributor to this more recent tradition, Yosso's (2005) CRT-informed critique of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) demonstrated the possibilities opened up when considering the cultural assets of nondominant groups, specifically students of color in postsecondary education.

Yosso (2005) argued Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) conception of cultural capital in its application to the United States higher education context essentially located White, middle-class culture as that most suited for navigating college. This situating of White, middle-class cultural capital as central to college success marginalizes the cultures of students of color as less valuable and implicitly reinforces the view that students of color with less exposure to White middle-class culture are somehow lacking. This focus on what students of color lack, and the pervasive assumption that what they lack is the result of their experience and outcomes in education, presumes students of color engage in higher education with a deficit. This deficit understanding

of students of color is so labeled in educational vernacular (i.e., *deficit thinking*, *deficit model*) and is explicitly named and critiqued by Yosso (2005).

Yosso (2005) argued that Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) work, as applied by "deficit scholars" (p. 82), often afforded less value to the culture of students of color as it applied to education. Yosso argued students of color do not lack cultural capital, and the cultural capital they possess is not useless in the context of college (Yosso, 2005). The cultural capital students of color do possess, Yosso argued, is valuable, and that capital is often precisely what equips them to arrive at college and, in the end, to survive its challenges.

Thus, Yosso (2005) sought to expand the conventional notion of cultural capital to include the *community cultural wealth* that students of color have access to. Yosso identified six types of cultural capital that contribute to community cultural wealth: (a) aspirational capital, (b) linguistic capital, (c) familial capital, (d) social capital, (e) navigational capital, and (f) resistant capital.

Aspirational capital is "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Yosso drew upon scholars of the Chicano experience in US education and to the dreams and encouragement parents bestow to their children even as educational outcomes for Latinx students are among the lowest (Yosso, 2005).

Linguistic capital refers to the language and communication skills students of color possess, which may include bilingualism and its accordant benefits, or being part of a culture with strong oral traditions, such as the use of storytelling, proverbs, or parables, to pass cultural and community history and wisdom to subsequent generations (Yosso, 2005). This would also

include the common experience of "bilingual children [being] called upon to translate for their parents or other adults" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79) and the awareness and literacies developed in so doing.

Familial capital refers to the understandings, knowledge, and commitments tied to communal kin and community "history, memory and cultural intuition" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). This may manifest as a student's intuitive understandings of their place as part of a larger community and a sense of cultural, moral, and social consciousness that bonds them to it.

Social capital, in the context of Yosso's (2005) framework, is similar to the more generic understanding of Bourdieu's social capital that, put simply, is comprised of students' social networks and related, inherent resources (Bourdieu & Passeron,1977). Yosso (2005) reiterated that rather than lacking in social capital, students of color often use social capital available to them to share knowledge about accomplishing their goals.

Navigational capital "refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80); however, Yosso (2005) underlined, "Historically, this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind," (p. 80).

Finally*, resistant capital* has to do with the opposition of communities of color to systemic oppression, and the capital (e.g., skills, knowledge) individuals develop as they rebel and resist the subordination that may pervade a person of color's existence (Yosso, 2005). The impulse to assert one's self and value and to affirm one's own humanity and right to space, speech, and power also fall within this domain (Yosso, 2005).

While there is some degree of overlap among these categories, the range of knowledge, activity, orientations, and relationships they describe is quite broad in their specificity. Isolating

precisely which factor is at play in any given instance is less important than the conceptual tools Yosso (2005) provided for thinking about students of color—and perhaps students who in other ways have been historically excluded from or marginalized in higher education—in ways that are sensitive to and affirmative of the students' knowledge, culture, and consciousness, particularly in the higher education context, in which too often students' home cultures have been seen as handicaps.

I include Yosso's (2005) framework not to systematically apply Yosso's categories to participants' testimonies but to provide a conceptual underpinning for understanding participants' experiences on their own terms, from a strengths/asset perspective, rather than a deficit perspective.

Community Colleges Nationwide

This section outlines a brief history of community colleges in the United States and the shift in attention from college access to outcomes that produced the current concern with equity. It also discusses the mission and functions of community colleges and how they represent a distinct institution in the US system of higher education. I proceed with an overview of community college student demographics. While most undergraduates in the United States are community college students, they differ from the conception of a "traditional" college student. I end this section by outlining the focus in the community college arena on completion, of which attention to equity is part and parcel, concomitant with a trend in US higher education on outcomes and accountability.

Background

Up until the 1940s, institutions that offered lower division college coursework were widely known as junior colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). These institutions took many forms, including branch campuses of universities, state-run institutions, and high schools offering college-level instruction (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). After a transition period in the 1950s and 1960s, by the 1970s the term *community college* came to be the standard term to refer to institutions that have a focus on offering study in the first two years of collegiate-level work (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 4).

Missions. Nevarez and Wood (2010) provided a succinct framework for understanding community colleges in terms of their visions, missions, functions, and operations. Vaughan (as cited in Nevarez & Wood, 2010) proposed five facets of a community college's mission. The first is *open access*, which refers to low or absent admissions requirements for enrollment. The second is *comprehensive educational programs*, which refers to the broad array of programs community colleges offer from lower division transfer preparation for all variety of academic disciplines to vocational training and remedial education. The third is *serving the community*; since their origin, community colleges have been built and supported on the grounds they serve local needs. The fourth is *teaching and learning*, which "refers to the process by which students receive instruction and learn from the teaching given," (Nevarez & Wood, 2010, p. 6). As institutions once conceived of as replacing lower division instruction so as to preserve and refine the research mission of universities, teaching and learning "has been a core value of the community college mission since its inception" (Nevarez & Wood, 2010, p. 6). The fifth mission of the community college is *lifelong learning,* which refers to the notion of community colleges

as sites of learning for individuals at any stage of their lives. Nevarez and Wood (2010) added a sixth facet of their own, student success, which refers to community colleges' acknowledgement of the importance of their students' aspirations and the college's role in helping students achieve their goals.

Functions. Nevarez and Wood (2010) identified the functions of community colleges as providing four key services for students. The first function community colleges serve is to prepare students to transfer to a four-year college to continue their baccalaureate education. The second function is to offer terminal (vocational) degrees, which are awards of acknowledgement or certification (i.e., associate's degrees or two-year certificates of completion) of completion of a course of study, either to demonstrate preparation for transfer to a four-year college or in preparation to enter a particular vocation. The third function is remedial education, in which colleges provide instruction in fundamental academic areas (typically English and math) at levels of proficiency below that deemed sufficient for college study. Finally, community colleges serve their communities by offering continuing education, which includes other types of instruction offered at community colleges, such as courses for enrichment and adult education. Concordantly, Cohen and Brawer (2008) identified five curricular functions of the community college: (a) academic transfer, (b) vocational-technical, (c) continuing education, (d) developmental education, and (e) community service and noted these functions are intertwined.

The distinction of community colleges within the US educational system. While some institutional facets are not unique to community colleges (e.g., student success, continuing education), community colleges in the US educational system are characterized by the combination of open-access mission and transfer function. Moreover, scholars have recognized

community colleges are defined by the collection of these myriad missions and functions in the same institution (Dougherty, 1994; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996), even if the meaning and implications of this amalgamation are debated.

Mellow and Heelan (2015) argued community colleges are a "distinctively American form of higher education" due to their combination of open access and student success missions that make it "committed to trying to create success for all manner of students who enter its doors" (p. 9). The resonance of the open-access mission of community colleges with the theme of upward mobility through education in US discourse has resulted in community colleges having been described and imagined as democratizing institutions (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Rhoads & Valdez, 1996). That supporters and detractors have framed community colleges as democratic institutions testifies to the symbolic power of this narrative.

Historical Context

Increasing access to higher education. The 1948 U.S. Commission on Higher Education report (also known as the Truman report) identified a gap between the proportion of college-aged individuals who could benefit from postsecondary education when compared to the proportion of individuals enrolled. The report recommended a substantial expansion of the junior college sector (Bragg & Durham, 2012; Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

In the post-World War II era, the GI Bill facilitated an overall increase in college enrollment while throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, a string of legislative actions increased federal support for higher education. In 1956, the Eisenhower administration's Committee on Education Beyond the High School acknowledged the importance of community colleges in providing opportunity for higher education (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). These developments

facilitated growth in community college enrollment and in the number of community colleges (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). Between 1960 and 1970, as the children of the World War II generation (known as the Baby Boomers) were entering college, the number of community colleges more than doubled (Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

The broad expansion of community colleges that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s provided increased access for students who did not traditionally attend college, including students of color, students attending part time, immigrants, and mothers (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Nevarez & Wood, 2010). The social and political context of the Civil Rights movement, student movement, and other social movements of the era resonated with the notion of equal opportunity in education associated with open enrollment policies (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). For some students, taking advantage of these opportunities meant being ill prepared to enter institutions similarly ill prepared to educate them. This policy was termed *the right to fail* and resulted in extremely high rates of attrition (Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

The 1970 Carnegie Commission on Higher Education heralded the open-access nature of community colleges, as it championed "universal access" (Dowd, 2003, p. 94) to higher education for every citizen. Such open access—influenced by policies at the highest levels of government that encouraged and incentivized the growth and expansion of community colleges—was lauded as a success for US higher education and representative of US values. A decade later, however, a shift in policy direction had taken root with a focus on notions such as quality, excellence, and efficiency.

Turning attention to outcomes. The 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education report, known as *A Nation at Risk* (1983), is seen widely as a turning point in K–12

education, marking the beginning of an era of criticism and persistent efforts at reform characterized by their focus on standards, external accountability, and economic efficiency. While the report "barely mentioned college" (Bailey et al., 2015, p. 4), it represented a policy shift, if not a societal shift, in attitude toward educational institutions beginning in the 1970s and continues to impact the higher education sector.

Following an economic downturn in the late 1970s, policy studies on community college funding and efficiency in the 1980s exemplified this shift toward a more critical view of community colleges. In California, state policymakers debated whether it should be notions of access and equality, or notions of excellence and quality that should govern decisions about the future of community colleges (Beach, 2010). Meanwhile, some states incorporated measures of student outcomes into their community college funding models—a practice known as *performance-based funding* (Dougherty, Natow, Bork Jones, Sosanya, & Vega, 2013).

During this same decade, regional accreditors began to include institutional effectiveness in their standards for colleges as they sought to emulate quality evaluation and control systems used by industry (Ewell, 2011). In 1990, the federal *Student Right to Know Act* (SRTK) (1990) set into motion the eventual tracking of community college student outcome metrics across the nation (Bailey et al., 2015). It took nearly a decade to determine a measure for graduation rates and require community colleges to publish them. While some have questioned whether the graduation rate measure's operationalized definition is appropriate for or applicable to community colleges, its development illustrates the persistence of the federal trend towards accountability and standards in higher education (Bailey et al., 2015).

In 2009, the Obama administration launched the American Graduation Initiative: a call to increase the number of college graduates by five million by 2020 in the name of US global leadership and economic competitiveness (Lester, 2014). A US president specifically citing the key role community colleges play in the nation's global standing was rare (Lester, 2014). It marked a shift at the federal level in viewing community colleges not only as vehicles for improving access to higher education but also as drivers of national outcomes (Bailey et al., 2015; Lester, 2014).

The Completion Agenda. While some scholars have denoted the Obama administration's 2009 American Graduation Initiative (Office of the Press Secretary, 2009) as the Completion Agenda, it is also used to reference the focus on outcomes in general that has become increasingly pervasive in policy and discourse about community colleges particularly in the past 15 years. In the years leading up to the announcement of this policy, private philanthropic organizations, including the Ford Foundation, the Lumina Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, had invested in community college completion (Bailey et al., 2015). In the wake of the Obama administration policy, states have returned to implementing performance-based funding.

Some authors, such as Levin (2007b), have argued focusing solely on completion distracts from the subtler hopes and victories students often seek and find in community colleges, even if they do not complete a degree or transfer. Dowd (2007) argued focusing on small victories can take "on 'mythical' proportions, perhaps as an antidote to the low rates of student success that accountability data reveal" (p. 411). Arguing successful outcomes vary greatly along racial/ethnic and socioeconomic strata, Dowd (2007) advocated for the disaggregation of

accountability data by race and economic status, a practice that in the mid-to-latter years of the first decade of the 2000s was still not pervasive. In conversation with this line of thought, Bragg and Durham (2012), citing the increasing domination of completion in policy discourse, warned against turning away from the open-access mission for the sake of increasing rates of completion. They identified this risk as a threat to equity and located a remedy in connecting access and completion together.

Increasing success and completion. As the national focus turned toward the extent to which community college students completed degrees or transfer, researchers have explored factors relating to student success at the college level. For example, Goldrick-Rab (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of empirical research on community college award completion. From an initial search of 3,000 articles, Goldrick-Rab reviewed 300 studies derived from independent data sets and used sufficiently rigorous quantitative or qualitative methods appropriate to the research question and, where applicable, with reasonably generalizable results. The analysis presented institutional practices that contribute to student success as opportunities in the context of structural constraints community colleges face as institutions and the social inequalities community college students face that serve as challenges to student success.

Among the efforts of philanthropic foundations to increase college completion, Achieving the Dream (ATD) was an initiative launched by the Lumina Foundation in partnership with other organizations to create a national network of community colleges that would commit to a set of principles, including (a) committed leadership; (b) building a culture of evidence; and (c) broad engagement among faculty, administrators, and staff (Bailey et al., 2015). Member

colleges of this voluntary network were encouraged to analyze data on student rates of success on a number of metrics and develop initiatives to improve.

Mayer et al. (2014) conducted a study of 26 community colleges involved with ATD and found these colleges' interventions largely consisted of (a) noncurricular support services, such as advising, early alert, or personal development and study skills; (b) co-curricular instructional support, such as tutoring or summer bridge; or (c) changes to instruction, including changes to curriculum or new approaches to instruction (Bailey et al., 2015).

Bailey, Smith Jaggars, and Jenkins (2015) from the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Columbia University's Teacher's College argued, at least in part on the strength of their long experience with ATD, the self-service model of course selection makes navigating the path toward a degree, certificate, or transfer an overly ambiguous and complex challenge for students. They recommended colleges shift from a cafeteria model to offering a limited number of clearly articulated guided pathways. For most colleges, this shift meant a radical redesign in how they provide academic programs and services.

Booth et al. (2013), under the auspices of the California-based Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges, conducted a mixed-methods study of nearly 900 students in 13 California community colleges, seeking students' ideas about the types of support the students believed led to success. These researchers identified six success factors resonant among student responses and named the factors in terms of needs the college must help promote or cultivate in students. Booth et al. (2013) found students most importantly needed to be directed and focused. To foster student success, therefore, colleges must help students understand specifically what they need to do to achieve their goals (directed), and help students

stay motivated (focused). Students also needed to feel someone cares about their success—to feel nurtured. Furthermore, students benefitted from meaningful, active participation, in and out of the classroom, a factor the researchers called *being engaged*, and developing relationships with peers and other members of the community reinforce that engagement, a factor the authors labeled *being connected*. Finally, Booth et al. found students benefitted from feeling valued—that their abilities, experiences, and contributions to the campus community were appreciated and recognized.

US Community College Students

Over the 2012-2013 academic year, approximately 10.1 million undergraduates were enrolled in public two-year colleges (Community College Research Center [CCRC], 2016; National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2014d). In Fall 2014, community college students made up 42% of all undergraduate students nationally (CCRC, 2016; Ma & Baum, 2016). Of undergraduate students enrolled full time in Fall 2014, 25% were community college students (CCRC, 2016; Ma & Baum, 2016).

Since the formative eras of junior colleges, generations of educational leaders have conceived of college students as a distinct class of individuals apart from other learners. Levin (2007b) identified this distinction at play in the nomenclature of *traditional* versus *nontraditional* students. According to Levin (2007b), "Traditional students are customarily viewed from a four-year college and university perspective as the norm" (p. 6). Levin (2007b) argued *student identity*—identifying as a student before other characteristics—is the paramount quality of traditional students. Secondarily, the assumption of having entered college directly following high school, which is tied with the student's age, and the assumption of being a full-time student,

are also important to the notion of the traditional student. Other characteristics are salient but less fundamental to the idea of a traditional student. Levin (2007b) wrote, "There is a continuum of traditionality" (p. 6) that includes characteristics such as having completed high school, having some previous family history of college attendance, speaking English as one's first language, being middle class, living on campus rather than commuting, and having some clarity about one's goals for or beyond college. Levin (2007b) also contended that although the notion of nontraditional student might be seen as the "antithesis of the traditional" (p. 6) student so-defined, "in some institutions, such as the community college, the nontraditional student is more the norm than the traditional" (p. 6).

The U.S. Department of Education (NCES, 2015) noted some characteristics researchers have commonly viewed as distinguishing nontraditional students are (a) enrolling part time, (b) working full time, (c) having children, (d) being a single parent, (e) having started college later in life, or (f) not having graduated high school (NCES, 2015). This same report stated, "74% of all 2011-12 undergraduates had at least one nontraditional characteristic" (NCES, 2015, p. 1), while 55% had two or more nontraditional characteristics (NCES, 2015, p. 6).

Table 1 demonstrates the extent to which students in public two-year colleges exhibit these nontraditional traits more than students in public and private nonprofit four-year institutions. For instance, the percentage of public two-year undergraduates in 2011-2012 who had dependents, who were single parents, or who entered college more than a year after high school were more than double the percentage for public two-year students. These and other nontraditional student factors, such as working full time, are considerably higher for public, two-year students than for traditional double the percentage for public two-year students. Public, two-

year students make up 38.1% of all undergraduates, yet 56.2% of undergraduates attending school exclusively part time, and no less than 44% of undergraduates who exhibit other nontraditional characteristics (see Table 2).

Table 1
Nontraditional Student Demographics: Public Two-year, Public Four-year, and Private Nonprofit Four-year: 2011-2012

Nontraditional Student Category	Public, Two-year	Public, Four-year	Private, nonprofit, Four-year
Financially independent (for financial aid purposes)	59.7	35.6	32.7
Has one or more dependents	32.4	15.4	17.0
Single with dependents	17.9	7.3	8.1
Did not enter college in calendar year of HS graduation	42.9	21.4	19.5
Exclusively full time	20.3	53.0	62.7
Mix of full time & part time	15.6	14.7	15.5
Exclusively part time	64.1	32.3	21.8
Worked full time	31.9	18.4	16.7
Worked part time	35.1	43.0	34.5

Note. This table does not include for-profit two-year or for-profit four-year institutions. *Source: Adapted from Web Tables: Demographic and enrollment characteristics of nontraditional undergraduates: 2011-2012 (NCES 2015-025)* by National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2015, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs 2015/2015025.pdf. Copyright 2015 by the U.S. Department of Education. Used with permission.

Table 2
Public Two-Year College Students as a Percentage of All Undergraduates with Nontraditional Student Attributes.

Nontraditional Student Demographic Category	Public Two-year Students as Percentage of All Undergraduates
All students	38.1%
Financially independent (for financial aid purposes)	44.4%
Has one or more dependents	44.9%
Single with dependents	44.8%
Attends exclusively part Time	56.2%
Works full time	46.9%

Source: Adapted from Web Tables: Demographic and enrollment characteristics of nontraditional undergraduates: 2011-2012 (NCES 2015-025) by National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2015, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs 2015/2015025.pdf. Copyright 2015 by the U.S. Department of Education. Used with permission.

Levin (2007b) noted the notion of nontraditional is conflated with the idea of what it means to be an *adult student*, a term with a definition that depends on its use and user. Levin explored a slice of the community college population with a new nontraditional student

conception rooted in these students' disadvantages. As Levin (2007b) contended, "The community college is de facto an institution for nontraditional students because it serves the most disadvantaged populations in higher education" (p. 11).

Given this context of the history and characteristics of community colleges in general, the next two sections will address the particular history and characteristics of community colleges in California, and the development of a statewide policy to address the problem of equity in that unique context.

California Community Colleges

In this section, I provide an overview of community colleges as they exist and have developed in the state of California. I first describe overarching characteristics of California community colleges, then go on to recount the history of the California community college system, from the origins and proliferation of community colleges in the early part of the 20th century, to their consolidation as a system in the 1960s. This overview of California community colleges includes the context of segregation and racial inequality in California that contextualizes these educational institutions. I end by describing students who populate the system.

Description of California Community Colleges

Over 7% of all college students nationwide attend one of the 115 California community colleges (NCES, 2014a). While each college generally hews to the generic community college missions and functions that characterize most community colleges, local characteristics—such as the characteristics and course-taking patterns of the student populations they serve—vary enough among colleges to correlate with varying degrees of student success (Bahr, 2013).

California's 115-college strong community college system is the largest public system of education in the nation in terms of students served (NCES, 2014a). Proximate to the start of this dissertation research, California's public, two-year college population by itself was larger than any other state's entire public sector (Ma & Baum, 2016), and with the exception of Texas, was larger than any other state's entire college population (NCES, 2014a-d). As summarized in Table 3, in Fall 2013, 1,463,051 students enrolled in public, two-year colleges in California (NCES, 2014), whereas all public college enrollment (two- or Four-year) in Texas (including post baccalaureate) for Fall 2013 totaled 1,349,609 (NCES, 2014a-d).

Table 3
Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions

Category of Institution	Fall 2012	Fall 2013	Reference
CA Public Two-year Enrollment	1,459,321	1,463,051	Table 304.60
CA Public Four-year Undergraduate Enrollment	669,831	685,096	Table 304.60
All Texas Public Undergraduate & Postbaccalaureate Enrollment	1,347,860	1,349,609	Table 304.15
All College Enrollment in Texas, including Private & Postbaccalaureate	1,540,298	1,541,378	Table 304.10

Source: Adapted from *Digest of Education Statistics, Table 308.10,* by National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2014, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_308.10.asp. Copyright 2014 by the U.S. Department of Education. Used with permission.

California community colleges, like the state, are characteristically diverse in population, geography, and community characteristics and vary such that two colleges may exhibit sizeable differences in their populations and the intensity of activity in one or another area of mission or function. In a quantitative study, Bahr (2013) conducted a *k*-means cluster analysis of student data from 105 California community colleges to identify a typology of colleges with respect to student enrollment patterns. From the analysis emerged five community college types that Bahr labeled according to the community college function most prevalently reflected in student enrollment: (a) community education intensive, (b) transfer intensive, (c) workforce development intensive, (d) high-risk intensive, and (e) mixed use. Bahr's findings allow us to reflect on the

reduction that may result from talking about and even comparing community colleges as if there were not quantifiable differences among them. Different community colleges may, whether by strategic intention or in response to the needs or organic demand of their local communities, emphasize some functions or aspects of mission over others. The diversity of such institutional mission/program orientations when added to the diversity of students across community colleges—including along the dimensions of proximity to disadvantage—should prompt us to take care as we speak, write, and think about community colleges, especially in comparison with one another.

Historical Background

California was among the earliest states to develop a tier in the educational system between high school and college. Progressive Era legislation in the state offered lower division college coursework to high school students for the first time in the nation's history (Kelsay & Oudenhoven, 2014). From 1910 to 1960, junior colleges expanded in California, with "nearly two openings every year" during this interval (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 8).

In the following decades, various independent evaluations at once acknowledged characteristics of the fledgling colleges—such as low status and low transfer rates—that endure to this day, while making recommendations such as per-student funding at lower levels than other institutions (Beach, 2010). These recommendations and conclusions were perhaps a product of a perspective that ascribed such outcomes solely to students' lack of fitness for university work or a commitment to preserving the sanctity of the university as a site of higher status, yet their recommendations could arguably be said to perpetuate these outcomes (Beach, 2010).

The master plan of 1960 that concretized California's three-tiered system of higher education reified these ideas as structural characteristics of the system of community colleges (Beach, 2010). At present, the California community colleges operate at the behest of a number of stakeholders and are charged to serve the largest proportion of postsecondary students with a myriad of educational functions with low per-pupil funding, compared to per-pupil funding of other state collegiate tiers.

Overlaid with these structural hurdles is the history of racial segregation in California, which is the context in which the system developed; colleges set up to serve students in particular localities are likely to reflect the social and economic realities, including residential segregation, unequal distribution of K–12 educational resources, and labor market opportunities, in which they are geographically situated (Beach, 2010).

Institutional origins. According to Beach (2010), California community colleges originated in the minds of the earliest leaders of California's elite universities. Community colleges were established formally in the state with the creation of the junior college certificate, which granted those who earned it admission as an upperclassman to the University of California (UC) and with legislation to fund public junior colleges in the first decades of the 20th century (Beach, 2010). In these years, elites envisioned a further refinement in the universities as sites of strictly advanced study. Junior colleges would serve, according to this vision, as sites where vocational and lower division education would occur (Beach, 2010).

In the early 20th century, Alexis Lange, known as the Father of the California junior college movement, was the Dean of Education at the UC Berkeley School of Education (Beach, 2010, p. 71). Lange worked with California State Senator Anthony Caminetti to draft legislation

inspired by conversations with the presidents of Berkeley and Stanford and by the ideas of William Rainey Harper, the inaugural president of the University of Chicago, who was also involved in the creation of one of the first junior colleges (Joliet Junior College). The legislation not only formalized the existing arrangements between the UC and high schools to provide college preparatory instruction "but also offer[ed] a junior college curriculum that was the equivalent of first- and second-year undergraduate courses at the University of California" (Beach, 2010, p. 71).

A few years the legislative foundation for junior colleges was established in the state, the junior college certificate was created, which "allowed any high school student automatic admission to the University of California as a junior" (Beach, 2010, p. 71). In 1917, further legislation "officially set aside state and county funds for public junior colleges" (Beach, 2010, p. 72). By 1921, California had "18 junior colleges, articulation agreements with the major state universities, and a secure source of funding from the state legislature" (Beach, 2010, p. 71). The colleges varied in form; most were annexations of high schools funded by public school funds, while some focused on vocational curriculum and lower division transfer.

California was an innovator in developing systems of higher education. In 1919, Los Angeles Teachers College became incorporated with the UC at Berkeley to become "the first multi-campus university system in the United States" (Beach, 2010, p. 72), while the next year, the State Normal Schools were re-envisioned as State Teachers Colleges. By 1937, there were 41 public junior colleges in the state. By the end of the 1950s, over 70% of California public college students enrolled in their first or second year attended community colleges (Beach, 2010).

Structural factors leading to the 1960 master plan. While the California master plan (California Department of Education, 1960) is often viewed as a founding organizing document of California's higher education system, Beach (2010) outlined how the master plan may be seen as consolidating an institutional configuration many decades in the making. As noted previously, elites were the crafters of the earliest California policy on junior colleges in line with a vision of further refining university education by differentiating it from college preparation and lower division coursework.

Beach (2010) argued, "These university leaders envisioned a state system of education in which vocational training would be offered in high schools and the new junior colleges, while advanced professional training would be reserved for the university" (p. 73). In the 1930s, colleges had turned to vocational instruction partly to conform to prevailing notions that advanced education should exclude individuals who were not capable of benefitting from it. A 1931 report by Suzzalo for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching recommended to the state legislature a tiered educational system with junior colleges at the "base [meant for] training students for semiprofessional and vocational work" (Beach, 2010, p. 77).

In practice, although most community college students in the 1930s were denied admission to the universities, a key reason many students enrolled in community colleges was precisely for the chance at social mobility that access to a bachelor's degree promised (Beach, 2010). Transfer rates in the late 1930s were likely between 20 and 25%, but may possibly have been as low as 7% (Beach, 2010). Thus, low transfer rates were structural features of California's developing higher education system decades before the first master plan in 1960.

Hill's 1938 evaluation (as cited in Beach, 2010) of the junior college system characterized it as a *semi-higher institution* that should be scientifically managed. Hill found while the UC enrolled 4,304 first-time students and the state colleges enrolled 3,260, the 42 state junior colleges enrolled 17,941. The 1947 report by Strayer for the governor's Committee on the Conduct of the Study of Higher Education in California recognized junior colleges were ascribed a low status, while recommending they take on the familiar functions of providing for the first two years of college, and vocational and semi-professional training. Beach (2010) asserted, "While junior colleges were expected to enroll the largest percentage of students, the report also recommended they receive the lowest funding per student" (p. 79).

In the 1950s, Clark (as cited in Beach, 2010) revealed the disconnect between students, who wanted academic preparation to transfer to four-year institutions, and administration, who sought vocational programs that would demonstrate the college's functional contribution to the region. The Clark report, like those that preceded it, reflected a deficit perspective of students and a presumption community college students were not suited to baccalaureate education. Thus, from the 1930s up to 1960, state-sponsored research and planning for higher education largely reinforced the stratification of the still-emerging system and the relegation of community colleges to high-enrollment institutions with low funding and status.

As federal policy in the decades after World War II provided vast resources toward expansion of higher education access and academic research, education leaders in California, particularly Clark Kerr, president of the UC, sought to consolidate the higher education system (Beach, 2010; Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

Several other studies consistent with the Strayer report were conducted in the 1950s toward this goal, leading to the formation of the Master Plan Survey Committee, led by Arthur G. Coons (Beach, 2010). The master plan itself consolidated the community colleges as the bottom tier of a grand system of higher education (California Department of Education, 1960), which included the California State Universities (CSUs) in the middle and the UC system at the top.

School segregation in California. As is evident in the history leading to and informing the master plan, community colleges in California were conceived of and institutionalized as lower tier institutions intended to shield the more elite state institutions from "incapable" students. As Beach (2010) recognized, "even if it was not official policy, until the 1960s most states in the United States actively segregated non-White students in educational institutions or classrooms from K–12 to higher education" (Beach, 2010, p. 84).

Before the U.S. Supreme Court established the constitutionality of separate but equal education in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), battles over school segregation played out in the state context in California. In its *Ward v. Flood* (1874) decision, the California Supreme Court at once "upheld the right of every child, regardless of race, to an education" (Beach, 2010, p. 85), while also validating the practice of separate-but-equal schooling. Efforts to desegregate San Francisco schools the following year led to a state constitutional amendment in 1880; however, although these changes desegregated schools for Black children, they "still left the option of separate schools that were used to legally segregate Asian, Mexican, and Native American children until the early 20th century" (Beach, 2010, pp. 85-86). While the *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947)

decision in 1945 allowed Mexican Americans "the right to equal, non-segregated schooling" (Beach, 2010, p. 87), school segregation laws were not ultimately repealed until 1974.

Underlying the slow progress toward equal education in California's laws were other factors that contributed to unequal education. As Beach (2010) pointed out:

> Segregated housing in large urban areas where most minority populations resided led to the creation of de facto segregation in public schooling. This created a system of separate and unequal schooling opportunities that kept many minority students from being prepared for or wanting to enter higher education. (pp. 87-88)

Just as it was an innovator in education, California was also an innovative site of anti-immigrant legislation. From its founding as a US state in 1849 throughout the World War II era, "California led the nation in anti-Asian agitation" (Beach, 2010, p. 86). California passed the first law restricting immigration in the United States in 1880 (Beach, 2010, p. 86). While there was conditional integration of schools for African Americans, the rest of California society was segregated, including consumer and labor markets (Beach, 2010). The community college system developed in the context of this segregation. As Beach (2010) explained:

> Despite the limited opportunity desegregated schools provided, junior colleges were often built in segregated school districts and disproportionately served the majority race of the local area . . . They surely fostered norms of social segregation and curricular segregation by race and sex, determined by the larger social segregation of the local population and regional labor markets. (p. 89)

In the first study on disadvantaged students in California (Martyn, 1968), Beach (2010) noted, "Race, racism, and social segregation are not even mentioned as causes of disadvantagedness" (p. 89). Therefore, just as community colleges were relegated to a lower tier of postsecondary study, students of color who, during and after the 1960s, increasingly came to populate these institutions often came from communities structured by the legacy of segregation and discrimination. Meanwhile, as Beach (2010) argued, the open-door policy amounted to

laissez-faire opportunity, belying that state planners ignored (if they were not hostile to) the needs of students of color, thus putting the high attrition (Nevarez & Wood, 2010) of these students in context.

This so-called *open door institution* could do nothing to compensate for the lingering racial hostility and social segregation in the community at large, and further, because postsecondary education was freely available to all students through community colleges, it was easy to blame students for their lack of abilities or motivations, rather than targeting the social environment for structuring the failure of non-White students (Beach, 2010). The segregated geography of housing and labor market opportunities was thus the same terrain in which community colleges were established and in which they exist today.

Implications for the present. Beach (2010) summed up the history of the California community college as an "overburdened and underfunded" institution (p. 59). In Beach's analysis, three factors have constrained the California community college and must be considered to contextualize student achievement in the system. This list of actors is not meant to absolve California community college administrators, staff, and faculty from their responsibility for the direction of their institutions.

The first factor, according to Beach (2010), is a lack of autonomy of the California community college system. Beach stated, "California community colleges have historically been managed institutions beholden to the interests of university officials, state legislators, and public-school administrators who used them as a filtering-out mechanism" (p. 70). Second, Beach noted, "California is not the only northern or western state to ignore its past of segregation and racial prejudice"; however, Beach stressed the fact and legacy of segregation pervades the state's

society, including its public school system and labor markets Third, Beach argued that from the beginning, the community college's systems financial resources were insufficient to the "myriad missions as set forth in the Master Plan and its successive revisions" (p. 79). Beach further noted despite this underfunding, it was among the earliest targets of "calls for institutional efficiency in higher education" (p. 79).

Student Demographics and Outcomes

Since the middle of the 20th century, studies have suggested most California community college students do not persist in their education, and therefore, do not transfer to Four-year institutions (Bahr, 2011; Beach, 2010; Brint & Karabel, 1989). While this trend has persisted, the demographic makeup of California community colleges has changed dramatically since then. While at the end of the 1960s, none of the 32 California community colleges were more than 53% non-White (Beach, 2010); currently over two-thirds of all college students in California are minorities (Koseff, 2018).

The demographic breakdown of California community colleges has changed dramatically in the past 50 years. Between 1960 and 1970, five out of the 32 largest California community colleges had minority populations above 35%, four had Black student populations of 25% or higher, one had a Latinx student population of 25% or higher, and none were more than 53% minority (Beach, 2010). Today, 33 of the 40 largest colleges have minority populations above 35%, and Hispanic/Latinx students are the largest group in the system, comprising 46% of the student population (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office [CCCCO], 2017).

Despite the starkly changing demographics, findings about the sociological nature of student behaviors and motivations in community college settings seem strikingly durable over

time. In the 1950s, an in-depth study of San José Junior College concluded that despite students' professed intentions to prepare to transfer to baccalaureate programs, most students did not transfer, and therefore, the junior college increasing became a place characterized by students filtered out of higher education (Clark, 1960, as cited in Beach, 2010).

A generation later, Brint and Karabel's (1989) historical, sociological analysis of community colleges arrived at a similar conclusion, in which they argued community colleges dampened students' higher education aspirations, and such bleak conclusions sparked a decade of academic work to further investigate these premises. More recently, Bahr (2011) performed a *k*-means cluster analysis using California community college system data to develop a typology of students based on particular course-taking behaviors and outcomes, of which he identified six patterns of enrollment. Bahr found the largest grouping of students studied (30% representing over 50,000 students) attempted an average of only 13 units, passing 23% of their courses (Bahr, 2011). These results echo those earlier arguments, suggesting that the largest cluster of community college students leave higher education without having made significant progress toward earning a degree or transfer.

Students in California community colleges have continued to face numerous challenges in reaching their goals. Chacón's (2012) qualitative study of low-income Latinx participants in the Educational Opportunities and Services (EOPS) program found that budget cuts stemming from the large economic downturn following the 2008 economic crash resulted in a more difficult college experience for these students. As a result of the downturn, the students in Chacón's (2012) study found their access to classes was reduced, while support and assistance

for students, such as book grants, library hours, and counseling, were scaled back, ultimately delaying progress and completion for them and their classmates.

In an ethnographic study, Felix (2018) found disconnections between students' aspirations and an institution's ability to consistently support them and disconnects between the intent and effect of the institution's implementation of transfer policies. Hart's (2019) early findings from a forthcoming dissertation, in which they interviewed 30 California community college students over the course of two years, referenced sociologist Marianne Cooper's term of *security work* to describe "the economic and emotional work done to maintain financial stability and manage the emotional burden of uncertainty" (p. 5) in which students all along the spectrum of nontraditionality must engage to manage precarious circumstances.

These recent studies of students in the California community college system suggest although factors that impede student success emanate from student circumstances and aspirations, the gap may more fittingly be located in institutions' lack of success—or perhaps the system as a whole—in aligning policies or providing services that are up to the task of supporting the goals of students given their actual needs.

Arguably, the problem of equity has been identified as policymakers have acknowledged the intersection of—on one hand, the failure of the community colleges to live up to the manifest function of their originating vision as a site of preparation for advanced study despite the disadvantages inherent in their latent function, as lower-status institution of postsecondary, vocational, and other non-K–12 learning for lower-class, nontraditional, and otherwise emerging communities that have also buffeted the universities from the majority of such students—and on the other hand, the ever-increasing racial diversity of the state. Given the background covered so

far, in this section, I discuss the origins and subsequent trajectory of the student equity policy for California community colleges.

California Community College Student Equity Policy

In this section, I discuss how the update of the California Master Plan for Higher Education in the late 1980s foreshadowed the student equity policy, which was established shortly after the update was published. I then describe the early years of the policy's administration, followed by its revitalization at the beginning of this decade. I end with recent developments that have and will continue in the near future to influence how the state administers this policy.

Equity in the California Master Plan for Higher Education

The 1987 renewal of the California Master Plan for Education cited four principal goals: (a) unity, (b) equity, (c) quality, and (d) efficiency (Commission, 1987). In the section about unity, this document put forward a narrative about the change in the California community college composition. In the mid-1970s, high school graduating classes began to decline in size, reflecting a nationwide trend. While the UC and CSU systems were able to absorb more college-eligible students who otherwise would have gone to the community colleges, the community colleges were faced with declining enrollment among transfer-seeking students.

According to the narrative in this document, "as enrollment in the transfer programs became less and less attractive to baccalaureate-bound students who might have enrolled, academic standards declined, and a downward spiral began" (Commission, 1987, p. 13). The rest of the paragraph mentioned the passage of Proposition 13 (California Constitution, 1978), which had the effect of reducing course offerings, counseling, and other services, and ultimately blamed

community colleges for losing sight of "their real mission" (Commission, 1987, p. 13), as they sought to increase enrollment by expanding program offerings.

The 1960s plan claimed, "The quality of an institution and that of a system of higher education are determined to a considerable extent by the abilities of those it admits and retains as students" (Commission, 1987, p. 13). It proceeded to argue a refocusing on a transfer mission and attracting baccalaureate-bound undergraduates would revitalize the higher education arena and conscripted community colleges to admit "all high school graduates and others at least 18 years of age capable of profiting from the instruction offered" (Commission, 1987, p. 14), implicitly labeling as "not capable" the majority of actual students in the system as it existed, who indeed would not transfer.

In this exposition, equity was couched almost entirely in terms of equality of opportunity. As the Commission (1987) went into depth, however, it stated:

> Educational equity goes beyond the legal guarantee of access to education. It is an environment of fairness and responsiveness necessary for each person to fully reach his or her educational potential. We will not succeed as a society unless there is a commitment by the state and our educational institutions to equip all people to fully participate in and contribute to the growth of our social institutions. An equitable society is stronger because it draws on the talents of all its citizens. (p. 21)

Later, the Commission cited, "Institutional barriers such as faculty and administrator attitudes, differential treatment, discriminatory curricula, and indifference must be addressed" (Commission, 1987, p. 21). The document sought to limit the remediation taking place at community colleges and to consign such work to adult education (Commission, 1987). It is also this document in which Quality Action Number 23 was written to get UC and CSU board members to influence accrediting bodies to "take sufficient cognizance of student 'outcomes' in evaluating institutions" (Commission, 1987, p. 37).

Inception and evolution of California community college equity policy.

In 1991, shortly after the master plan revision, the California legislature incorporated the language of equity into the educational code (Michalowski, 2014). This framing departs from the policy document itself, which places its development on a continuum with BOG discussion in 1985 on decreased minority student enrollment in the wake of charging fees, through to a Committee of the Board on Equity and Diversity in 1989.

The rationale for the policy was described foremost as due to the dependency of California's future economic success "on the successful education of its future workforce" (Guichard, 1992, p. 3), which the text acknowledged would be increasingly made up of underrepresented students. Further, the policy demonstrated recognition that although community colleges have provided access to underrepresented groups, individuals in these groups has been statistically less likely to be successful (Guichard, 1992).

The policy has required community college districts to "develop, implement and evaluate a student equity plan" that would ensure colleges afforded "equal opportunity for access, success, and transfer" (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2002, p. 1). Equity plans are to consist of (a) campus-based research assessing the state of student equity and "institutional barriers to equity" (Guichard, 1992, p. 9), (b) goals for the areas of "access, retention, degree and certificate completion, ESL and basic skills completion, and transfer for each of the historically underrepresented groups as appropriate" (Guichard, 1992, p. 9), and (c) implementation plans designed to achieve the goals, which took into account coordination with other equity activities, funding sources, and proposed evaluation process and schedule.

Definitions for data elements aligning with the goal areas, called *student equity indicators,* were recommended. These were (verbatim):

1. *"Access.* Compare the percentage of each group that is enrolled to the percentage of each group in the adult population within the community served.
2. *"Course completion.* The ratio of the number of courses that students actually complete by the end of the term to the number of courses in which students are enrolled on the census day of the term.
3. *"Degree and certificate completion.* The ratio of the number of students who receive a degree or certificate to the number of students with the same informed matriculation goal.
4. *"ESL and basic skills completion.* The ratio of the number of students who complete a degree-applicable course after having completed the final ESL or basic skills course.
5. *"Transfer rate.* The ratio of the number of new students who earn six or more transferable units during their first college year and who also stated at entry their intent to transfer, to the number of students who transfer after 1 or more (up to 8) years." (Guichard, 1992, p. 11)

Evaluation was explicitly cited as an important component of the policy. Furthermore, the BOG expressed its intention to collect data on progress toward equity statewide (Guichard, 1992).

In the policy, the BOG argued the state would be best served if districts and colleges created plans that would fit each college's local characteristics and traditions and with the approval of each college's faculty and staff. Thus, the BOG recommended plans be a product of each district's shared governance processes. Nevertheless, Nguyen et al. (2015), in their report for the Community College League of California, noted, because "no resources were allocated for this purpose . . . the mandate was largely ignored" (p. 7), as attention and resources to the policy waxed and waned over the years.

A new strategic plan by the California Community College BOG in 2006 fueled the imperative for other efforts at reform, such as the California Basic Skills Initiative (BSI), which

was reflective of the BOG strategic plan goals of improving student success while adjusting policy to raise the minimum level of English and mathematics required to earn an associate's degree statewide. Some of the projects undertaken as part of the BSI included in-depth research on basic skills best practices and professional development to promote the adoption and proliferation of innovation to increase success in basic skills.

Illowsky (2008) reported, "Only 29% of the students who enrolled in a basic skills class in the 2001-2002 academic year earned an associate's degree or vocational certificate or transferred to a [four]-year institution by 2006-2007" (p. 83). A major economic downturn lasting from 2008 to 2013 prompted large decreases in the budget for California community colleges. While the initiatives under the umbrella of BSI retained momentum, there was a relaxation of regulations that accompanied the cuts, which included the student equity policy (CCCCO, 2017).

Revitalization of student equity policy.

In 2011, the California Community College BOG created a task force to develop a strategic plan for increasing student success. The 20 individuals on this task force consisted of community college practitioners from a variety of arenas (i.e., leadership, faculty, and researchers), along with students, government representatives, and experts from the academy (CCCCO, 2011). The recommendations from the Student Success Task Force were introduced as SB 1456 (*Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012*) to the California legislature, and passed in May 2012. The bill included revisions to pre-existing legislation guaranteeing matriculation services—specifically, orientation, counseling, and the creation of an individual education plan—to students entering community colleges in the state.

In 2013, the chancellor's office created the Student Equity Workgroup for the sake of revitalizing the student equity policy. In 2014, Governor Jerry Brown proposed $100 million as a line item for student equity in community colleges, a step Nguyen et al (2015) described as "unprecedented" (p. 4). Currently, student equity plan regulations are outlined in Sections 51026 and 54220 of the California Code of Regulations. Operationally, student equity policy has reinvigorated the mandate for colleges to create equity plans through ties to categorical funding.

Integration and vision: Changes and consolidation since 2016.

In the second half of 2016, the Chancellor's office under Interim Chancellor Erik Skinner, announced it was "suspending the requirement for colleges to submit" (Walker, 2016, p. 1) plans for the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP), Student Equity Program, and BSI, for the year as it sought "to facilitate greater integration, alignment, and streamlining of these three programs" (Skinner, 2016, p.1). These were the first steps of the state chancellor's office effort to integrate the three plans into one integrated plan (Walker, 2017).

In December 2016, Eloy O. Oakley, formerly Superintendent-President of the Long Beach Community College District, was appointed Chancellor of the California Community Colleges by the system BOG. At the end of the academic year (June 2017), Oakley published the state system's Vision for Success, outlining ambitious goals and commitments for improving student outcomes. Among the goals was to eliminate equity gaps within 10 years, specifically to

> reduce equity gaps across [student achievement measures identified in other goals] . . . through faster improvements among traditionally underrepresented student groups, with the goal of cutting achievement gaps by 40% within five years and fully closing those achievement gaps within 10 years. (Foundation for California's Community Colleges, 2017, p. 1)

Following the announcement of the *Vision for Success*, several substantial policy shifts developed rather quickly. One such change, Assembly Bill (AB) 19 (*Community Colleges: California College Promise*, 2017), established the groundwork to waive tuition for the first year of enrollment at California community colleges for state residents. One of the most portentous projects initiated the adoption of guided pathways (see Bailey et al., 2015) throughout the state. This program established a framework of financial support advisory/collaborative support to push the colleges to plan and transition to a streamlined model of course and program offering in line with Bailey (2015) and colleagues at Columbia's CCRC's recommendations, known as guided pathways (CCCCO 2019a).

Another momentous transition was Assembly Bill 705 (*Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012: matriculation: assessment,* 2017), which radically inverted the logic of math and English placement and subsequent enrollment for students. The legislation was drafted in response to research findings questioning the efficacy of placement tests and arguments these tests funneled an inordinate number of students into a sequence of basic skills (remedial) courses, which many students postponed or found difficult. Assembly Bill 705 directed colleges to allow students to place directly into college-level math and English so as to facilitate greater and more expedient success and progression. Colleges seeking to keep their existing assessment tests would have to provide evidence their use fostered greater throughput success than allowing students to self-place.

The most momentous of all of the changes initiated in the 2017-2018 academic year was the change to the funding formula for community colleges across the state from a strictly enrollment-based model to a partially performance-driven model called the *student success*

funding formula. This change followed a similar change in the funding formula for K–12 schools in the state several years prior, and was supported both by Governor Jerry Brown and the new chancellor (Fain, 2018).

In addition to these sweeping changes, the student equity policy was also tweaked. Assembly Bill 504 (*Community Colleges: Student Success and Support Program Funding,* 2017) altered the language of the equity plan legislation to shift focus from the access to and completion of training and courses in domains representing the various community college functions (e.g., basic skills, career technical education and workforce training, and transfer) to a focus on the outcomes of those functions: access and retention, degree and certificate completion, ESL and basic skills completion, and transfer. In practice, the revitalization of student equity policy enforcement since the Student Success Initiative and SB 1456 took these now-official changes for granted. Another requirement of AB 504 directed the state chancellor's office to specify a methodology for identifying equity gaps and sought to bring clarity and uniformity for the sake of the policy's adherents.

The student equity policy was further altered the following academic year, when colleges were asked to reframe equity plans in the context of the chancellor's *Vision for Success* and guided pathways. Equity Plan Policy was transformed into the Student Equity and Achievement (SEA) Program ([AB 1809] *Higher Education Trailer Bill*, 2018) policy launched in the 2018-2019 academic year sought to further consolidate the legacy categorical programs with the new reforms under Chancellor Oakley in the effort to provide colleges more unity and flexibility in their planning. While for a time, the equity plans' integration with the BSI and the SSSP plan

seemed to be a dilution of equity as a state-level policy priority, the consolidation under the SEA nominally seeks to re-establish equity as a top priority for community colleges system wide.

Since 2017, the state chancellor's office has been working to implement these new policies, as have individual colleges. Meanwhile, the chancellor's office has implemented a new system of data metrics for accountability, meant to represent an evolution from the Student Success Scorecard, developed in the aughts and refined in conjunction with the student success initiative. These new metrics provide a resource for colleges to monitor their progress on the chancellor's vision goals, while innovating the conceptual and narrative framework around the metrics via learning from the work at the state, local college, and collaborative level to implement the student success initiative. As policies with different origins, while similarly aligned to overall goals, the calculation of these metrics differed from the performance measures in the new state funding formula. As California worked to implement all of these changes, colleges were in the position of planning to comply with guidelines not fully articulated or that seemed to change several times throughout the year (Walters, 2019).

Conclusion

As the administration at the state level of the student equity policy has changed over time, this study's concern was to investigate what understandings of equity might be ascertained from perspectives and experiences of the presumed beneficiaries of said policy: students. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology, design, execution, and analysis that comprised this qualitative case study in search of insight to the concerns embedded in the research question.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the methodology of the study. The research question, concerned with the understanding of equity in the context of individual students' experiences at a particular community college, was most appropriately engaged using qualitative research. Flick (2014) described qualitative research as "oriented towards analyzing concrete cases in their temporal and local particularity and starting from people's expressions and activities in their local contexts" (p. 22). This discussion begins with a justification for the choice of methodology. Following this section, I describe the research design, including the population and sample, activities of data gathering, data analysis, and other methodological considerations related to the design, such as reliability, validity, and researcher positionality with respect to the study.

Research Question

Community colleges are complex organizations, and equity is elusive both as a concept and as an outcome of practice. State policies, such as the California student equity policy, purportedly seek to redress gaps in student outcomes not unique to any particular college. However, implementation of such policies varies given each college's unique institutional dynamics (e.g., organizational structure, culture). The California student equity policy is especially flexible in its potential variability because colleges are given independence in crafting their own equity plans.

This study stemmed from the recognition that understanding the ways in which equity is understood in the context of one particular case study institution provides valuable insight for theory and practice. Furthermore, it is important to understand how such policies correspond to

the experience of their intended beneficiaries: students. Motivated by these concerns, this study investigated the following question: In light of the goals of the California student equity policy, how do students in the context of a particular community college define and experience equity?

Research Design

Qualitative Methodology

Hatch (2002) identified numerous key characteristics of qualitative research. First, Hatch explained qualitative research takes place in "natural settings" (p. 6). As Hatch described, "For qualitative researchers, the lived experiences of real people in real settings are the objects of study. Understanding how individuals make sense of their everyday lives is the stuff of this type of inquiry" (Hatch, 2002, pp. 6-7). Furthermore, Hatch explained, "Qualitative research seeks to understand the world form the perspectives of those living in it" (p. 7). Meaning is central to the purpose of qualitative research and its origins as a mode of inquiry. Qualitative research is also characterized by data that are for the most part produced via the direct participation of the researcher, and the researcher needs an extended period of engagement with the context and/or individuals under study (Hatch, 2002).

The aforementioned traits depict qualitative research to be a deeply human enterprise in its focus and instrumentation. Because conducting qualitative research is itself a social act, it necessitates *subjective judgment* and *reflexivity* (Hatch, 2002) from the researcher for the data to be produced and appropriately contextualized. Finally, qualitative inquiry begins with the understanding that the social contexts and phenomena under study are complex, and qualitative methodologies seek to account for that complexity as wholly as possible (Hatch, 2002). With this aim, the design process of qualitative research is often emergent and the analysis is typically

inductive (Hatch, 2002). These characteristics aligned with the purpose of this study and described a methodological approach appropriate for addressing its research question.

Case study. Yin (2009) defined a case study as "an empirical inquiry that i) investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context, especially when ii) the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 16). Case study is an appropriate method of research to employ when one "want[s] to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth, but such understanding encompasses important contextual conditions" (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

In this study, the real-life phenomenon was the experience of students in the context of a community college seeking to increase *student equity* in relation to internal and external motivations. This study's research question framed interest in this phenomenon in a specific setting and in light of a specific policy. Therefore, this case study used qualitative methods to investigate the key elements of the research question, which was asked in the setting of one racially and socioeconomically diverse community college in a major metropolitan center, through the articulated experience of its students, faculty, and administrators, and in light of the California student equity policy.

As Merriam (1998) noted, "Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research" (p. 19). This study's primary interest was in unearthing the experience of students in the context of a specific setting, Pacific College. While this study sought to understand a particular college unique in its setting and institutional makeup through an understanding of the students' perceptions and experience, ultimately, I hoped to shed light on something deeper about how the relationships and tensions between these perceptions and

experiences of equity relate to the opportunities and challenges that any diverse community college may have in fulfilling its mission with regard to equity.

Participant Selection and Sampling Criteria

Research setting and demographics. The research setting in which the study occurred was Pacific College, a pseudonym used to refer to a public community college located in La Paz (pseudonym), a community in a large metropolitan area in southern California. At the time the study was proposed, Pacific's enrollment was 15,000 students, representing a wide range of ages. Specifically, 21% of students were younger than 20 years of age, almost 33% were between 20 and 24 years of age, and another 33% were between 25 and 39 years old. The Pacific College student gender breakdown at the time of the study was 59% women and 41% men.

When I launched this study, approximately 43% of students at Pacific identified as Latinx, 27% as African American, 14% as White, and 9% as Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander. Compared to the statewide population of community college students, Pacific had a higher proportion of African American students (27.2%) than the state (6.4%), while Pacific's proportion of Latinx students matched the state proportion. Pacific also had a considerably lower proportion of White students (14%) than the state (27%) and had a slightly lower population of students under 20 years of age (21%) when compared to the state (26%).

Pacific's surrounding communities are heterogeneous. In one direction are historically African American communities that vary from traditionally well-off to income challenged, and in other directions are neighborhoods that are historically White, middle-class, and wealthy. Meanwhile, the increase in Latinx populations throughout most of these communities, in the

region, and in the state have led to Latinx populations overtaking African Americans as the largest racial/ethnic student population at Pacific.

For a sizable proportion (28% overall: 30% of staff and 29% of faculty) of Pacific's employees, demographic data of the racial and ethnic composition of Pacific's employees were not available at the inception of this study. Based on employees for whom data were available, the various employee classification groups differed from each other in racial and ethnic makeup, and Pacific's employee population differed from the student population in racial and ethnic makeup as well. For instance, as of Fall 2015, African Americans made up 26% of Pacific's staff and 16% of Pacific's faculty, while Latinx made up 21% of the staff and 8% of the faculty. Thus, African Americans appeared to be the largest racial or ethnic subgroup among the staff, at over one quarter of this employee group; African Americans and Latinx together make up nearly half of the staff (sum of 47%), even with 30% of the staff with unreported race or ethnicity. Whites employees made up the largest proportion of the faculty at 35%, and 29% of race or ethnicity among faculty was not reported. From the perspective of the student, the White plurality of the faculty may be even more pronounced when looking at disaggregated categories because Whites represent 38% of adjunct faculty and 47% of full-time teaching faculty.

Institutional agents. Using meeting minutes, emails, and notes, I compiled a list of administrators, staff, and faculty who had been invited to or involved with workgroups discussing the equity plan since 2014. Among these individuals, I first identified 14 as primary candidates for study participation. At the recommendation of my committee, I reduced the number of employee interviewees to five.

Appendix A (Tables of Student and Institutional Agent Participants) summarizes characteristics of individuals interviewed. In the selection process, I gave consideration to diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, gender, institutional function, knowledge of equity plan development, and other student success efforts, student services, and levels of interaction with students. Some of the issues that emerged from early student interviews also influenced the selection of these particular faculty and staff. Each of the five selected had been involved in efforts across campus functions and/or committees concerned with improving student success. Four of the five had contributed to development or administration of the campus equity plans, indirectly through participation in the equity plan workgroup/advisory committee or directly as part of their principal job responsibilities. Each participant had knowledge of a relevant area pertinent to equity plan success indicator areas (e.g., access, course completion).

Students. I selected student participants using convenience sampling. In Fall 2017, I contacted 20 faculty, counselors, and student-facing offices, including the 14 initial interview candidates who were faculty or counselors, asking for assistance in recruiting students. Specifically, I asked these individuals whether I could either visit their classes (for those currently teaching) or if they could distribute typed invitations (which I provided) to either their classes or individual students, requesting their participation in the study. The invitations contained basic information about the study and my contact information. I also informed the contacts that as a token of appreciation for their time, I would be offering a $15 gift card to Target© to study participants.

Of the students to whom I reached out, 11 individuals responded, of whom I eventually interviewed seven during the Fall term of 2017. In Summer 2018, I made an attempt to interview

additional students. I contacted three faculty and counselors who were teaching in the summer to invite their students in the manner described above, and I also sent one final email to the four students who initially responded with interest earlier in the year but did not eventually interview. From these requests, four students responded, and two eventually consented to be interviewed. In all, nine students were interviewed; Appendix A delineates some basic demographic information about these individuals as well as their chosen pseudonyms and the time/duration of their interviews.

Methods for Data Collection

Documents

The California student equity policy mandates every community college in the state to develop college equity plans in conversation with campus communities and in accordance to campus governance processes. The documents most directly relevant for this study were those directly dealing with the policy and the plans between the period of 2014 and 2018, a time period consistent with the years leading up to when the interviews took place (see Table 4)

In addition to those listed, other documents were useful in providing insight to the context of policies and their implementation. Other documentation reviewed or referenced included (a) minutes from college governance committee meetings or other artifacts of committees and workgroups (e.g., college council, student success committee), (b) integrated planning documents such as the educational master plan, and (c) others relating to grants or categorical funding (e.g., SSSP Plan, Basic Skills Plan). Additionally, because guidelines of the policy have changed over time, state policy documents, such as memoranda, instruction manuals, forms, and guidelines, also proved useful as sources.

Table 4
Documents Reviewed

Document	Short Description	Year Adopted
Educational Master Plan	Strategic plan for the college	2014
Equity Plans 1 & 2	These plans were required to include sections researching areas in which identified populations are vulnerable to disproportionate impact in student outcomes in the areas of access, course completion, ESL/remedial math/ English progression, degree & certificate completion, and transfer.	2014, 2015
Integrated Plan	As a requirement for certain categorical funding, this plan is intended to consolidate and integrate for future planning purposes the equity plan, Student Support Programs & Services (matriculation/SSSP) Plan, and Basic Skills Plan.	2017

Note: As Pacific College institutional planning documents, these materials were not formally published, but were available on publicly available Pacific College webpages related to planning and circulated internally among personnel and administrators.

Observations

Campus committee meetings and other activities (e.g., workshops, campus events) in which I (as the researcher) was an invited participant provided opportunities to observe the discussion of issues related to equity including programs, policies, students, and student success. Notes from such meetings provided an additional data source. In selected gatherings, I recorded what was observed in notes which: (a) primarily described in plain terms what was observed, (b) separately noted any interpretations of what was being observed, and (c) record impressions of my self-observations. These notes, listed in Table 5, also helped provide context for the other information gathered via interviews, documents, and my field journal.

Interviews

The interviews were intended to be semi-structured, narrative interviews. I planned to interview each individual for one hour; however, most of the interviews lasted a bit longer. Each individual was contacted directly by email. When a participant responded, I attempted to set up

Table 5
Participant Observations

Meeting/Event	Short Description	Time(s)
Access & Enrollment Forum	Forum organized by President Forum in which individuals across campus roles discussed the path a student takes to enroll at the college.	November 2017
Committee Meeting on issues pertaining to student success	A governance subcommittee largely comprised of faculty, which also includes staff and administrators among its membership. The committee discusses issues of student success and monitors various interventions to improve student success.	October 2017 November 2017
Committee Meeting about issues pertaining to institutional metrics	A governance committee comprised of a mix of faculty, staff, and administrators in which issues pertaining to institutional accountability, metrics, planning, and governance processes are discussed.	October 2017 November 2017

an initial meeting in which I would discuss the consent form (see Appendix B) and ensure they understood the nature, terms, and meaning of consent to participate in the research as well as their rights as participants in the research (see Appendix C). Then, before each interview, I spent 10 to 20 minutes with each participant discussing and ensuring the interviewee's comprehension of the nature of the interview, the terms of the consent form (if not discussed prior), and the meaning of consent with regard to their participation in the study.

I offered each potential participant the opportunity to take the consent form and think about their consent if they preferred. Most of the participants preferred to conduct the interview right away; however, a few did take the consent form, after which we set a later date to conduct the interview itself.

Interview questions. The interview questions were designed to elicit participants' perspectives relevant to the study's research question in the context of their own personal experiences. The interview questions, listed in Appendix D, were thus crafted to address the

research question, with consideration of my positionality with respect to the participant groups. In light of this, interview questions for institutional agents and students differed somewhat.

The first questions were designed to encourage the participant to reflect on their experiences at Pacific. One reason for this strategy was that it provided an opportunity for a conversation about the meaning of equity to more organically emerge in terms of the participant's articulation of her or his experience as a whole. The student equity policy strategic metrics correspond with elements of a student's journey to and through community college: (a) their matriculation and enrollment (access), (b) progressing through any math, English, or ESL coursework required before taking college-level coursework (basic skills), (c) progressing through and passing courses in general (successful course completion), and (d) finally completing the practical goal of earning an award or transferring to a four-year institution (degree/certificate completion and transfer). The interview questions for students were designed to solicit students' experiences of these aspects of college life.

I asked students about their experiences at the school to frame the conversation. Likewise, I also asked institutional agents to first discuss their roles with the college; because institutional agents were more likely to be familiar with equity as a term relevant to community college professional work than students may be, asking them to discuss their professional background and current roles also oriented their definitions of equity in relation to their work and experiences. The second half of the interviews focused on questions crafted with the conceptual framework (particularly Dowd & Bensimon, 2015) in mind to develop interview prompts that more directly elicited stories and ideas about equity or justice.

These three components of the equity as a standard framework referred to differences in how equity is conceptualized (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Justice as fairness relates to the concept of equity or justice in reference to notions of rights, fairness, or equality of opportunity. Justice as care relates to conceptions of student worth, perspective, value, contribution, or the need for caring/attention to the emotional or developmental needs of students. Larger forces of racism or other forms of oppression, the power of story or narrative to give testimony to oppression or resistance or to counter status-quo narratives (e.g., colorblindness, meritocracy), or the need to connect with broader societal struggles as bearing upon the activities and experiences at Pacific represented justice as transformation. I asked students to elaborate on and share any stories from their experiences that illustrated the above conceptions for the sake of generating narrative that would shed light on their perspectives related to the concept of equity.

Interviews were recorded electronically using a digital audio recording device. For the sake of securing the confidentiality and privacy of participants, I stored interview audio files and transcripts on a personal Google Drive (http://drive.google.com) account. The interviews were transcribed using one of two methods: (a) procuring the services of Verbal Ink (http://www.verbalink.io), a company that specializes in transcription and translation, or (b) transcribing the interviews myself. After two years from the publication date of the research, the recordings and transcriptions will be deleted.

Analysis of Data

Qualitative research, data collection, and data analysis must be an iterative process. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argued this recursive quality of the research process is characteristic of qualitative research. As they explained, “Collection and analysis should be a *simultaneous*

process in qualitative research. In fact, the timing of analysis and the integration of analysis with other tasks distinguish a qualitative design from traditional, positivistic research" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 195).

Saldaña (2011) identified that a key component of analysis in qualitative research is in recognizing patterns and categories of behavior or activity and how they interact. In this study, I cultivated patterns and categories through an inductive process of data analysis. Saldaña (2011) defined induction as "what we explore and infer to be transferable from the particular to the general, based on an examination of the evidence and an accumulation of knowledge" (p. 93). The inductive analytical process I used to translate the evidence gathered in this study into findings occurred through cycles of coding and analysis.

Yin (2016) summarized the process of analyzing data as inclusive of five phases: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. In the *disassembling* step I read each transcript to develop an overall sense for content and tone. Subsequently, I read each interview through and coded. For each interview, I interpreted bits of data, varying from a phrase to a paragraph, and gave each excerpt a short code describing its content. A key concern inherent in the research question was the relationship between individuals' experiences (mediated by how they articulated experiences) and notions of equity. To gain insight into this question, in vivo coding, or, coding "words or phrases . . . that seem to stand out as significant or summative of what's being said" (Saldaña, 2011, p. 101) was the approach I took as my guideline in coding statements about participants' experiences.

I then read through the codes to begin a process of summarization, the step to which Yin (2016) referred as *reassembling*. I read each transcript through again to identify codes that were

repeated. I also made note of codes I interpreted to be similar or related in topics or motif. I then read through the codes several additional times to identify repetition, similarity, and relationship of codes across transcripts. In several sessions of this process, I organized codes into informal groupings. This process was iterative and, to some degree disjointed. Repeated iterations of the code summarization exercise revealed some codes to be strongly related, resulting in groupings of codes that appeared in repeated episodes of grouping. Other codes reflective of prominent motifs across the data permitted more flexible grouping.

The final phases of interpretation and conclusion were fulfilled throughout the process of organizing and writing Chapters 4 and 5. Yin (2016) noted, "The recursive relationships among the five analytic phases" (p. 219), and thus, information from early analysis explicitly and implicitly influenced subsequent data collection, analysis, and (re)interpretation. In addition, as Yin (2016) predicted, initial interpretations led to recursive "return[s] to the reassembling phase" (p. 219). Throughout the process of data analysis, I referred to notes made before, during, and after the interviews; notes made during transcription and review of outsourced transcriptions; notes from grouping sessions; and analytic memos of my thinking and insights (including provisional and prospective groupings) at various points in time about the analysis and interpretation of the data. Discussions with colleagues and faculty advisors were also helpful in thinking about and making decisions in each phase of analysis.

Trustworthiness, Positionality, and Reflexivity

Trustworthiness

Krefting (1991), drawing upon Guba's (1981) discussion (as cited in Krefting, 1991) of evaluation of quantitative and qualitative research, provided suggestions for increasing the

trustworthiness of qualitative research, including four standards to which qualitative researchers might aspire and five strategies that lend to the meeting of these standards in one’s research.

The first standard of this model is the truth value—or *credibility*—of the research, which refers to the accuracy of “descriptions or interpretation of human experience” (Krefting, 1991, p. 216) and the recognition of close and instant affinity between the research and the experiences of others who share the experience (Krefting, 1991). While direct applicability or generalizability to other groups in other contexts is often not a presumed aim of qualitative research, I take responsibility for providing enough information to inform a reader who may seek to transfer the findings, a concept known as *transferability*. While qualitative studies are not replicable as quantitative studies can be, concerns with consistency in the data appropriate for qualitative research reflect an awareness of the breadth or narrowness of experience detailed in the study and the factors leading to or curtailing variability.

Dependability is a standard that refers to an awareness on the part of the researcher of the sources of variability in the experiences being researched. Finally, where quantitative research might concern itself with neutrality, in Guba’s (1981) model (as cited in Krefting, 1991), confirmability refers not to objectivity but rather fidelity between the data and the experience being captured, which is a product of truth value and applicability (Krefting, 1991).

Prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement with informants or subjects is among the primary practices that can enhance credibility. The more rapport that exists between researcher and participant, the greater the opportunity there is for openness in the information shared. I conducted the research in this study in a limited time frame—a matter of months—which made prolonged engagement difficult to establish with the student participants. Prior professional

relationships with institutional agents such as faculty, staff, and administrators bestowed a priori familiarity with me as the researcher.

Triangulation. Triangulation is identified by Krefting (1991) as a strategy that can enhance credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Through the analysis of documents, observations of meetings and workshops, and interviews, I was able to gain insight from multiple vantage points about the institutional context using several data methods and sources. This strategy may also bolster confirmability in the analysis and interpretation of the research, providing richer backing for research findings (Krefting, 1991).

Peer debriefing. Throughout the process of conducting this study, I engaged in peer debriefing for the purpose of reflecting on the path of the research. Numerous meetings and consultations with peers and faculty advisors in the early and middle stages of data collection/analysis helped me to develop a sensibility for making decisions about coding. Later in the data analysis phase, consultations with peers and faculty advisors helped me in my thinking about code groupings, organization of data, and interpretation of the results.

Field journal. The field journal I kept contained documentation of the research process, including logistics, decisions and rationale regarding methods, and cognitive and affective study-related observations, including self-observations. The use of a field journal was an important tool for systematically incorporating reflexivity into the research process. Reflexivity strengthened the study's credibility by providing a mechanism for monitoring the distance/closeness between myself as the researcher and my participants. In addition, recording the logistical and methodological events along the path of the research bolstered my ability to provide a full

description of the research process, and thus the ability for "transferability judgments to be made by others" (Krefting, 1991, p. 221).

Positionality

Identifying the researcher's *positionality* is important to mitigate any potential bias or skewed conclusions of research results. As for my positionality related to this study, I am a male, African American in his 40s at the time of the study. I was born and raised in southern California by two parents: one the child of Black Texans who migrated to California in the 1940s and the other an immigrant from West Africa. My parents were married to each other and both employed. Specifically, my father graduated from college and was self-employed for most of my life.

I attended public schools, received good grades, applied to competitive colleges, including an elite research university, and was susceptible to status bias against community colleges, even though I would need to rely on one after leaving the elite research university without a degree. I eventually earned a bachelor's degree, then a master's, and later enrolled in a doctoral program. I also found work in higher education. These facts are accompanied by status and class privilege of having a certain level of education, credentials, and economic security.

Since high school, I have been interested in the ideas of education, race, identity, and democracy and have pursued these ideas with varying degrees of consistency. My interest in equity, particularly in working and studying at community colleges, is a product of my past experiences and interests. My positionality with respect to race, nationality, language, gender, and ability are factors that heavily influenced this research.

Reflexivity

I was an employee of Pacific College during the period of time when this research was conceived and designed and during which the data were collected. I had worked there for several years and had developed a rapport with some of the staff, faculty, and administrative participants. I have also contributed to a limited extent in the efforts to craft equity plans and efforts to increase student success and equity at Pacific. My prior involvement with equity plans and the individuals who participated in them was beneficial because having established a rapport led to deeper conversations and familiarity with the context of the site.

Prior involvement added the risk of introducing bias to the extent that any presumptions or judgments could have influenced the collection or interpretation of the data. One technique I employed to mitigate this was to ask challenging and counter-posing follow-up questions in the interviews to get the employee participants to elaborate on their thoughts. I entered each interview with curiosity and sought to draw out the participant's ideas, even on topics where there seemed to be common understanding. To some degree, my previous exposure to some of the conversations on campus regarding student success may have influenced my interpretation of the data by drawing my attention to aspects of student experience that seemed less prevalent in such conversations.

My role as an employee at Pacific did not require contact with students, and I did not live in the community surrounding Pacific College. The incongruence in my familiarity with the employee participants compared to my lacking familiarity with the student participants risked influencing the consistency in data collection and interpretation between these populations.

My position as a staff member adjacent to administration may have introduced a level of discomfort with the students. Gumperz (1992) argued differentials in power and culture may also complicate matters of interpretation. To mitigate these factors, I sought to make the students I interviewed as comfortable as possible. When possible, I spoke with them in an informal, conversational style. I made a point to take as much time as possible to familiarize the students with the tenets of interviewee consent, emphasizing their rights as participants. I also chose to structure the interviews to begin with soliciting the students' stories about their journeys to Pacific. By inviting the students to begin with such storytelling, I hoped to make the students comfortable with me and to frame our connection in the moment as one of trusted, empathetic disclosure. While I did take notes during the interviews, I tried to be as mindful as possible of my affect and physical communication cues of listening, such as maintaining eye contact, nodding, and asking relevant follow-up questions. In the analysis and interpretation stages, Yosso's (2005) framework of community cultural wealth was a vital touchstone. Reflection upon Yosso's work and the purpose of amplifying the students' voices helped guide my decisions in the process of organizing and presenting the data.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand how students' understanding of equity and their experiences in a particular institutional context might provide insight for defining equity. This chapter provided an outline of the design and methodology of this study. Given the research purpose and question, qualitative research—an approach to research interested in context, human experience, and meaning—was the most appropriate approach. In particular, case study, with its emphasis on the understanding of a particular enclosed phenomenon was the chosen qualitative

approach. Data were collected from documents, observations of meetings in the setting, and interviews of five faculty and administrators and nine students. In the next chapter, I present the evidence gathered based on the methodology described in this one.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

> I never saw college in my future . . . at all.
>
> Barry, study participant

Barry would never forget his first day of class at Pacific. He was coming down with "a terrible fever" but despite feeling ill, he still showed up for his 8:00 AM math class. While his mother advised him to stay home, he was determined. He said to himself, "I can't stay home because if I don't go to this first day, somebody might take my spot. You know, people are trying to crash classes." His father dropped him off. It was raining that day. He did not want to be late or look like he was lost or unsure of what to do. He was lucky that this nightmare did not come true. He made it in time to find a seat close to the door. He described the experience, not so much being sick in a math class at 8:00 AM on a rainy day, but being actually in a place he never imagined himself, as "unreal":

> I just sat down and . . . I was reflecting on my whole life and how I just graduated from high school and I had gotten a scholarship and I had really enrolled into Pacific, and I'm one of the first people in my family to—I started to re-self-reflect my whole life *[laughter]* and I totally forgot to take out my notepad and start to take notes! (Barry)

Barry described his family as being ambivalent to his pursuit of higher education. However, he also remembered how, while participating in the summer bridge program, other participants shared similar experiences, particularly those who grew up poor and Latinx:

> Certain members in our family wouldn't take education serious[ly]. Or they treated it more like optional. It wasn't really mandatory, like, "Oh, you go from here and then you go to college." It was more like, "Okay, well, you graduate high school or not, and if you don't, go ahead and get a job." And if you're making money, you're good. You're set. That's it! Like if you were able to get a job that paid $15 an hour with pension, it's like, you're set for life or something . . . you know, that was just it. There was nothing more. . . . And so, for us to go through this journey and then having parents who came from a

> different generation, especially when there was no education instilled in them, it was hard to receive that support from them. (Barry)

To add to the ambivalence he felt from his parents about his college aspirations, Barry felt pressure being the youngest child in the family with older parents nursing significant medical concerns. In spring, his second term at Pacific, Barry's mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. He was overcome with a tremendous sense of responsibility to contribute to his family's finances. To deal with this crisis, Barry dropped most of his classes and got a job. His depiction of this time in his academic career was striking because of the internal struggle he recounted. As a gay Latinx person growing up in an immigrant community, he had to literally fight his way to this point, having endured multiple traumatic events before building himself up from the depths of depression as a young teen to graduating high school and becoming prom king. Now, embarking on a path that might provide some uplift for himself and his family through higher education, Barry's past vulnerability and hardship reverberated into the grave events of his present. As a student, this was inevitably tied in with his future, as it affected his ability to make use of the opportunity he had never imagined for himself. Stories like this one of competing priorities and pressures, yet facing them with resilience, are the heart of the findings that follow.

Organization of Chapter

This chapter has a focus on describing *the realities of students' lives*. This phrase encapsulates an idea that was invoked by the faculty, administrators, and students I interviewed: Most students' lives are complex, full, and sometimes volatile, in myriad ways. The culmination of this fullness, complexity and volatility engendered intuitive generalizations among my interview subjects that the institution's operations are incongruent, oblivious, or hostile to those realities.

The description of the findings is dominated by data collected from the students and, to the extent possible, from their points of view. Interviews were also conducted with five employees at Pacific: three deans, one counselor/counseling faculty[2], and one teaching faculty. These interviews provided additional information about various aspects of Pacific from the points of view of representatives of the institution including, but not limited to, efforts at increasing student success and equity (including the equity plan), perceptions of and interactions/relationships with students, professional background and values, and perceptions about the college overall. While the findings I present have a focus on the student perspective, at times I will draw upon the perspectives of the institutional agents to provide additional depth or support to the evidence revealed in the students' testimonies.

The findings are organized into three overarching themes. The first theme, "All These Other Factors . . .": The Realities of Students' Lives that Make Staying and Succeeding in College More Difficult, shows challenges and barriers to student persistence and success. The second theme, "Why Make It Even More Harder? It Shouldn't Be That Way": Student Stories of Institutional Hurdles, has a focus on difficulties students face that are, in contrast to challenges emanating from their circumstantial or personal realities, generated by institutional (college/personnel-generated) conditions or actions. The third theme, "Your Time Will Come": Community, Caring, Validation, Growth, shows elements of students' educational experiences of support, care, validation, and personal growth that are positive.

This choice of themes is useful for meaningfully organizing the evidence, but comes with the risk of—in one way or another—artificially exaggerating or augmenting the polarity of, or

[2] Counselors have the rank of faculty in California community colleges.

imposing polarity onto, the evidence gathered. This risk may bring on the additional hazard of reducing student experiences to starkly positive or negative events. Students' discussions of the evidence did not always fall neatly into positive and negative categories. Moreover, in a given student's testimony, events or circumstances sometimes contained both positive and negative aspects. For instance, evidence of caring and evidence of a barrier may co-exist in the same event or circumstance.

An example of such a dialectic present in the data might be, for example, one student citing the struggle of tending to their mental and emotional health, while also expressing gratitude for the on-campus counseling services. In the presentation of the findings I have chosen, the dichotomies of struggle and support are highlighted in different sections for the sake of simplicity in presentation. An explicit example of this is the passage opening this chapter from my interview with Barry, in which he recounted his first spring term. In that passage, Barry followed his expression of gratitude for the Puente program with a description of academic trouble, a family medical crisis, financial hardship, serious emotional health concerns, and the necessity of work, ending with the positive note of getting a B in his remaining class that term and successfully getting a job.

Because the different areas of students' lives bleed together, any organizational choice I could make in presenting these findings would similarly impose boundaries that could feel as artificial and have had different costs to faithful representation of the evidence. It is my hope, then, that the chosen organizational scheme allows for an extensive discussion of the major categories of experiences expressed by the study participants, and that in the telling, the imbrication of these elements is faithfully conveyed in a manner that ultimately provides depth

and insight to the question that motivates this research: In light of the goals of the California student equity policy, how do students in the context of a particular community college define and experience equity?

Setting and Context of the Study

Pacific College is a single community college in a multiple-college district in southern California. Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students make up over 70% of the student population. State figures of students who start at a particular college complete associates degrees, certificates, or 60 transferable units show that students who start at Pacific complete these outcomes at rates below the state average. Following the trend in this data throughout the state (and on a wider scale, nationally), Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students who start college at Pacific complete the outcomes at rates below the rates of their White and Asian peers at Pacific.

Changing Educational and Administrative Climate at Pacific

In the years preceding this study, Pacific had borne a maelstrom of change. In the earlier part of the 2010s, during the years in which the financial crisis continued to affect the state's budget for community colleges (Chacón, 2012), the number of courses offered were limited. In these early years of the decade, the college developed a student success plan, and college leadership was energized by participating in voluntary government and nonprofit intercollegiate efforts and organizations promoting innovation at the community college-level to increase student success. The excitement turned to concern as, in the following year, under a period of heightened scrutiny by its accrediting agency (Barber & McNair, 2017), the college's accreditation visit resulted in sanctions. As the college mobilized around making corrections to

clear the sanctions, the passage of SB 1456, reinvigorated the enforcement of previously mandated activities (including equity plan policy) associated with categorical funding. As the college organized to meet the requirements, the institution's strategic plan was set to expire that same year, launching a process of creating a new strategic plan that would take into account the student success plan and the still formative plans for equity and student support programs and services.

For roughly the first half of the decade (2010s), the college did not have a permanent student services vice president. By 2015, the college president left, causing a shifting of administrative roles on the academic side as well, with some administrators feeling the pressures of performing multiple jobs. Meanwhile, the college continued to face pressures requiring institutional mobilization. As the economy improved, community college districts were encouraged to increase enrollment, which Pacific was able to accomplish, while many other colleges struggled[3]. Additionally, the schedule of accreditation visits was reorganized such that the college was due for another full self-study and visit only a handful of years after the previous one. This time, the college's feedback included numerous commendations.

An institution in the midst of change during this study. Two years after the departure of the college president, a new permanent president was announced. A year later, when the data collection for this study began, the president hired permanent academic and student services vice presidents to fill the positions that had been occupied by interim administrators for several years. Changes of much larger-scale were also coming to fruition at district and state levels.

[3] In 2014-15 California Community Colleges were budgeted for 2.75% growth, though only grew by 2%. The 2015-16 budget proposal funded 2% growth. (Taylor, 2015; Taylor, 2016)

At the district level, the announcement of a retirement buy-out plan precipitated a wave of retirements across the district, including at Pacific. In addition, the district's years-long effort to transition away from its legacy information system was fully implemented the same term I interviewed participants for this study. As students, staff, faculty, and administrators had to learn an entirely new system in order to accomplish what before were routine tasks, the district suffered a drop in enrollment.

At the state level, critiques of math and English assessment and placement processes as mechanisms that prevent students, particularly first-generation and students of color, from accessing transfer-level coursework, and hence, from earning associates degrees and transferring, had culminated with the passage of new laws requiring schools to consider students' high schools in addition to test scores in placing students. This change came on the heels of the publication of the recently-appointed state Chancellor's strategic vision, ambitious in its goals for improving student completion. In addition, colleges across the state were beginning the process of qualifying for their part of $150 million, approved to implement guided pathways frameworks across the state. The most significant change, however, was the announcement of a new funding model to be implemented in the coming years that would gradually shift from being entirely attendance/enrollment based to incorporating performance-based elements.

Ramifications for students. Some of the effects of the institutional context on students are generalizable. The limiting of classes made progressing through a course of study difficult for students (Chacón, 2012). Practices such as hiring freezes may have also limited the availability for student-facing support, such as counseling (Chacón, 2012) and may also have limited the ability for administrative functions to operate efficiently for students. The SB 1456

legislation ushered in changes for students as well, including a policy change no longer allowing students to register for a course more than three times. For students who struggled to progress through math and English requirements but persisted in attempting to take gateway classes, this policy foreclosed options previously available at the currently attended college (Chacón, 2012). The implementation of a new district information system also impacted students as their processes of finding classes and enrolling online changed. Furthermore, the concomitant processes on the administrative end—adding and cancelling classes, downloading or generating information reports, etc.— also changed, and in some cases, tied to district policies that were being redeveloped or reworked, causing slow-downs and bottlenecks across the colleges in the district as faculty, staff and administrators relearned how to accomplish basic tasks. In some cases, whether due to new policies or miscommunication about the system, students' abilities to register for classes was delayed or severely frustrated.

Changing Political Environment

This study took place in a decade that featured dramatic turns in politics particularly salient to Latinx and African-American students, which I will briefly note here for the sake of context:

Immigration policy and protections for undocumented students. In 2011, AB 130 (*Student Financial Aid: Eligibility, California Dream Act of 2011)*, and AB 131 (*Student Financial Aid*, 2011), gave students who are nonresidents but allowed to pay nonresident tuition (a right granted by AB 540, *Public Postsecondary Education: Exemption From Nonresident Tuition,* 2002) the right to apply for state financial aid. In 2012, the Obama administration through executive order began the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program,

"provid[ing] temporary relief from deportation and a two-year work permit to qualifying young adults ages 15 to 30 who were brought to the U.S." (Lopez & Krogstad, 2014, p. 1) as children without official documentation.

Black Lives Matter. Meanwhile, after the killer of unarmed teenager Trayvon Martin was acquitted, "the [Black Lives Matter] movement began in 2013 with three queer Black women in response to anti-Black racism" (Hope, Keels, & Durkee, 2016, p. 204). This movement "gained momentum via social media following the police-involved murder of Michael Brown Jr." (Hope et al., 2016, p. 204) and continued to grow as demonstration, outrage, and political activism protesting the deaths of Black Americans by police and the social and political system that permitted these situations became a perpetuating national news story.

After the 2016 election. The 45th president of the United States ran a campaign that was blatantly disparaging and hostile to Mexicans and Muslims, explicitly xenophobic and implicitly racist to other non-White groups, adopted the rhetoric of and made gestures to White supremacist, White nationalist, and in some instances, Neo-Nazi groups, and associated with arch-conservatives with records of supporting and implementing anti-immigrant, anti-Black, anti-LGBTQ, and anti-poor policies. (Isaac, 2018; Leonhart & Philbrick, 2018; Main, 2018)

Following this president's inauguration in January, the year 2017 thus marked the first year of a dramatically different political tone in which all of the aforementioned interests were ascendant, emboldened with the power of the executive branch, the highest federal office, and a Republican-controlled Congress eager to fulfill its agenda. The administration immediately attempted to establish a ban on immigration from a set of majority-Islamic countries (Kocher, 2019). Rising levels of hate crimes have been attributed to the president's influence (Southern

Poverty Law Center, 2016). Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) began conducting intimidating deportation raids nation-wide, including across California, going so far as to stalk convenience stores, elementary schools, and courts to target individuals for arrest and possible deportation (Castillo, 2017; Kocher, 2019; Queally, 2017). White nationalists and Neo-Nazis were emboldened to demonstrate at en masse in Charlottesville, Virginia, less than a mile from a university campus, with one demonstration resulting in the death of a counter-demonstrator, Heather Heyer (Bierman, 2017). Additionally, the president announced a ban on transgender individuals from the military via social media (Davis & Cooper, 2017). As the administration announced the revocation of DACA, some cities and colleges declared themselves sanctuaries while others debated, declined, or dawdled, definitively outlining the risks and guarantees they wished to or determined were possible to provide students who would be justified in feeling threatened in this new environment (Kocher, 2019; Muñoz, Vigil, Jach, & Rodriguez-Gutierrez, 2018).

About the Students

As described in Chapter 3, I interviewed nine students as part of this study. Seven of the students were individuals I interviewed in Fall 2017 (referred to by the pseudonyms Aleja, Annie, Barry, Jeff, Jesse, John, and Taylor) and two were students I interviewed during the summer term of 2018 (referred to by the pseudonyms Claudia and Maritza). Their experiences at Pacific were diverse. One student (Maritza) had taken classes taught by Pacific instructors at her high school and was at the time taking a course in the summer at Pacific before attending a state university. Another student (Taylor) had already graduated from Pacific and was in the first term

of their studies at the closest UC campus. Aleja, Jesse, and Claudia referenced being close to graduating, while Annie, Barry, Jeff, and John seemed to be in the midst of their coursework.

As noted in Chapter 3, recent state figures showed Pacific's enrollment to be 43% Latinx/Hispanic and 24% Black/African American (CCCCO, 2011). In this study's sample of students, two were Black (22%: Annie and Jesse), while the other seven (78%) have Latinx heritage. Pacific's gender balance in recent figures is 61% women and 39% men (CCCCO, 2011). Among these nine students, four (44%) identified as women, four (44%) identified as men, and one (11%; Jeff) identified as gender-nonconforming. In terms of age, one student interviewed (11%: Maritza) was under 20, compared to 22% of Pacific students overall; four students interviewed (44%: Aleja, Barry, Jeff, and Taylor) were between the ages of 20 and 24, compared to 32% of Pacific students overall; two students (22%: Jesse and John) were between 25 and 39, compared to 34% of Pacific students overall; and finally, two students (22%: Annie and Claudia) were at least age 40, compared to 12% of Pacific students overall.

There are other characteristics of these students' backgrounds worthy of note. For example, three students I interviewed indicated they had immigrated to the United States: Annie and Claudia as adults and Aleja as a child. Barry, Jeff, and Taylor identified as children of immigrants. Barry and Taylor are gay men. Annie and Claudia are both mothers who are currently or were previously in heterosexual marriages. Four of the students hailed from high schools within 10 miles of the campus.

Presentation of the Data

"All These Other Factors . . .": The Realities of Students' Lives that Make Staying and Succeeding in College More Difficult

> But obviously you have like all these other factors that come into account and that[s] what makes it hard---at least for me –based on my experience, like it hasn't been hard because of the class itself and the teacher or the content. But it's been hard because of the outside factors, so that year it was definitely very hard for me.
>
> Aleja, participant

In this section, I discuss challenges students brought up in conversations having to do with the realities of their lives, and how their circumstances, identities, personal histories, and embodied existence have mediated their experiences as students in ways that make being a student difficult.

In the first category, I highlight the financial straits of students, suggesting how financial in/security, the necessity of work, and juggling competing priorities with limited time can frame the parameters of students' choices. Sometimes, students discussed challenges that seemed specific to their experience as embodying a particular identity; in the third category, degrees of "aloneness," I present examples from students I interviewed that elaborate this feeling and highlight instances in which students indirectly or directly experienced isolation and silencing on campus. The final category, internal struggles and dark moments*,* has to do with the internal struggles about which the participants talked. The decisions and actions entailed in becoming a community college student are often accompanied by feelings of vulnerability. Along the path, critical life events or circumstances in the present that trigger past trauma may lead to strong internal struggles, such as depression.

Community college students face many challenges in being students. The intent of this section is to convey a sense of the breadth and depth that these challenges can take by illustrating how they have been experienced by the students in this study.

The financial straits of students. Coming from another part of the state, Taylor had planned for months to attend another college in the same community college district. He had researched inexpensive areas to live, but upon moving, wound up renting closer to Pacific. In the weeks before the fall term, his roommates told him that Pacific was just down the street from his apartment. Enrolling at Pacific instead of the other college was simpler "since it's all the same district . . . It was really easy to just enroll here instead of over there" (Taylor).

Taylor moved to the area with savings from work and money his mother gave him when she and his stepfather broke ties with him after his coming out. He spent the money to move halfway across the state and was expecting financial aid to help him with his fresh start in college. In his first term at Pacific, while taking a full-time load and working three jobs, Taylor recalled he was told by the financial aid office, "Give it like a couple of days. Give me two or three business weeks."

He was not taken seriously with his inquiries about his financial aid until early November, at which point they discovered with financial aid packages accepted at two schools, both were frozen as a precaution against fraud. This happened despite the reassurances of the Pacific employees with whom he had spoken in August, who had told him he "wasn't going to have to worry about anything." In reality, Taylor recalled the following:

> So then, they had to do this whole thing, and I didn't even end up getting my financial aid until late November or so. During the whole semester, I was working three jobs and going to school full time because I was trying to—obviously, I wanted to—Like, I came

> here to go to school, but also, I needed to pay my bills. So, I was working three jobs and it was like, oh my god. It was terrible!

Aleja also had issues in receiving financial aid. She applied for the BOG fee waiver, a type of state aid that covers student fees every year. While in some semesters, applying and receiving the fee waiver was not problematic, Aleja recounted one occurrence of being denied "because apparently, like, you can't be that poor." For Aleja, a student whose experience with higher education before and during her time at Pacific was characterized by problems with paperwork and administration stemming from her status as an undocumented student, this instance was another in a long line of barriers.

The start of this chapter included a description of Barry's predicament, in which a confluence of financial circumstances, family crisis, and emotional turmoil led to him dropping most of his classes in his second term of school and looking for a job. Barry spoke about coming from a poor immigrant family and feeling the weight of responsibility to do what was best for his family during a crisis, while at the same time in turmoil about the need to escape from poverty:

> Yeah, that's been my experience so far. You know, that's where it made it harder for me because I had to step up and get a job because I wasn't getting that financial support anymore, especially with the dynamic at my parents' house. Financial struggles! I had to step up and kind of take a little bit of responsibility. There wasn't a day that didn't go by where—*[starts talking slower with long pauses]* I felt, like, helpless, you know? You feel so trapped and you're trying to find a way out. You're trying to find a way that's better . . . You're trapped in insecurity. And get trapped in oppression. You're trapped in! You're trapped in your own journey. It almost feels like you're walking your journey and like, this whole fog or cloud just comes around you and you're just lost. You don't know where to go. You don't know where to find clarity. You don't know where to find your solid ground. So, you're just kind of floating. You know, that's really what it felt like for me.

Barry's metaphor of oppression and insecurity as being trapped and in a fog was entwined with his desire to rise out of poverty, his identity as a Mexican child of immigrants, and his journey as a gay man. When I asked him what he meant by "insecurity," he said"

> Insecurity for me, for being a gay Latino, for being the youngest of seven and only three of us graduated high school, and [now only] one of us is going to college. Having that insecurity of not wanting to fail, of not wanting to be a loser, [or] to be . . . unsuccessful.

This sentiment encapsulates all of these elements that make up Barry's identity and his motivation for being a student. This was made all the more challenging because Barry's parents did not see the value of Barry's pursuit of education in the same way he did.

Getting and keeping financial aid can be precarious for some students. The aftereffects of dropping his classes for the spring, finding a job, and the pressures of these situations impacted Barry's academic life. He attempted to re-enroll in the following fall term, but he struggled academically, eventually losing financial aid. Barry commented:

> Unfortunately, there was damage in my academic records, in my attendance and the W record led to me getting a disqualification from FAFSA. It led to me getting my BOG Fee Waiver taken away from me. And so, it made that pressure higher.

In Barry's case, the multifaceted negative impacts of economic precariousness on his academic life contributed to rippling effects: diminished financial support for his persistence in college and increased mental/emotional strain.

Mary, a faculty member, had many conversations with students, hearing firsthand about their lives, struggles, hopes, and goals as students. She witnessed how financial precariousness exhibits particular characteristics for the women she has taught and mentored:

> Women students often are moms and often have really challenging time balancing the demand. Many of them are raising the children alone. They started their family before having any education. So, they're working very low-paying jobs and they want to better themsel[ves]. And a lot of them have the potential, but the financial responsibility is very

> hard. So, then on top of that, sometimes because they live in places that are not super safe or they don't have access to transportation, they have to rely on public transit. There are a lot of other added things that come with not having money.

Women who are also poor face compounded pressures on their finances and time as they are more likely to be primary caretakers of children and elderly parents and work in service industries, where hours can be unpredictable, conflicting with rigid class schedules. In the quote above, Mary illustrated how all of the factors involved in life—working, caretaking, getting from place to place—are mediated not only by poverty or financial stress but also gender.

In the next section, I shift focus from the institution and the workings of the college itself to students' life circumstances, and their experience as they pertain to the combination of resource constraints that, in turn, constrain their choices as students.

"I don't have time…": School decisions constrained by time, work, and life. For most of the students I interviewed, the level and quality of their engagement with college (i.e., enrollment, unit load, extracurricular participation) was in counterbalance to their life responsibilities (especially employment) and decisions about one had ramifications for the other. Ultimately, time was the common thread in how they talked about this relationship. For several students, there was an implicit understanding that time used for work and other life issues was necessary, while enrollment at Pacific in pursuit of an educational goal was a choice.

Necessity of work. While life could seem to interrupt or interfere with students' academic lives, some students were in a position to take calculated risks and prioritize school, even knowing this decision may introduce additional financial strain. In addition, other life issues, including accidents and other unexpected events, also created challenges for succeeding or even

continuing in coursework. This section touches upon how these interplaying life factors showed up in the lives of the students I interviewed.

Following Taylor's story demonstrates how the necessity of work shaped his experience as a student and how he highlighted its impact in terms of time. In the previous section, Taylor was described as working three jobs. He was on his own without support from his parents, so in addition to working at a grocery chain (transferred from his hometown employer), he found jobs at a local restaurant and at a local mall gift shop. He said, "You know, applying for jobs—it's like a job in itself! So, it was really time consuming. But I was like, 'Okay, I'm not going to make it with just these three." Taylor was eventually able to stabilize his work situation, keeping one of the three jobs, and eventually finding paid work on campus.

Course-taking: Modality and unit load. The relationships between time, work, and the mode of engagement also play into students' choices of when or by what modality they should take classes. Several students mentioned taking classes in the evening, and a few mentioned taking classes online. Taylor's frenetic work schedule in his first term necessitated classes in the evening; later, when he got a job tutoring, he taught the "night shift," helping students in the later hours of the day. Meanwhile, Aleja sometimes took day classes and sometimes evening classes, depending on her work schedule.

Two students, Claudia and Jesse, made the decision to transition from attending part time to taking a full-time load. After having made the transition to attending full time, these students continued to work. Claudia found a work-study position in one of the college's administrative offices, and Jesse quit a position at a bank to find more conveniently scheduled work as a security guard.

The differing economic situations of the participants shed light on the circumstances of their choices. Claudia, a divorced parent of one, discovered she could take advantage of financial aid and was at a point in her new relationship to move in with her boyfriend, thus finding additional economic support. In contrast, Jesse, revealed the hardship that accentuated the stakes of his decision to change his employment and spend more time at school, saying, “You know, sometimes I go through financial struggles. . . . [I have] financial gaps where I just don’t—sometimes I don’t have as much money to eat as I would like.” While Claudia had supports to reduce her income, Jesse’s experience shows how precarious attending full time can be for some students who have fewer supports and may further constrain an already limited income with this choice. Their examples emphasize the gravity of the choice to use time in a different way and strengthen the implicit understanding of how necessary it is to work for many students.

Unexpected events. Unexpected events can knock a student off of their path, forcing them to consider dropping out of school. From the previous section, the illness of Barry’s mother is an example of an unexpected event that altered a student’s path. Another anecdote that illustrates this reality was provided by Victoria, a counselor:

> I had a young lady who went through a divorce, a really horrible divorce. Now I saw her paper, and I saw that she had been doing good, and then she went bad, and then it was horrible. And then, that’s what she wanted to talk to me about, her GPA. . . . We took her from going full time to part time for the next two semesters so we can work it out, and then go back on full time.

Similarly, Annie’s enrollment at Pacific was interrupted more than once by accidents that impacted her physical ability to keep up a heavier pace. Soon after she started school at Pacific, she got into a car accident, which caused her to drastically slow down her academic progress. Annie recalled that it

> made me kind of slow down and stop because I wanted to do the thing very fast in a fast paced [way], so that it can be done, but due to my car accident and all that—maybe the tiredness of my body—I needed to slow down, and I just told myself, instead of staying without taking any classes, why don't I take one class at a time? It's going to take me long, but at least I'm not just sitting there and waiting like the doctor told me [to do].

Annie was determined to continue her studies. She mentioned she did not want to "[sit] there and wait," but in her case, a serious event made it physically impossible for her to follow her original ideas about how to get through Pacific. Each of these cases illustrates serious life events lead to a reduction or postponement of enrollment.

In the past few pages I have highlighted some of the stories and situations the students I interviewed shared that illustrate the confluence of life factors—financial strain, the need to work, and the potential complications of financial aid delays and unforeseen events—can affect students' ability to engage, whether in terms of their academic performance or their enrollment (Levin, 2007b). The next section provides a description as to how aspects of identity shaped participants' experiences as students, often for the worse.

Degrees of aloneness: Identity and isolation. The intent of this section is to talk at once about two loosely related phenomena I identified in the data collected: degrees of aloneness experienced by students at Pacific and identity-specific experiences at Pacific. As for my discussion of identity-specific experiences, my intent is not to be exhaustive or even to catalogue all of the ways students in this study mentioned identity but to highlight illustrative examples that stood out among the students' accounts.

What I seek to do here is highlight some of the ways in which the accounts of the students in this study illustrate points on a spectrum of isolation—from not being engaged on campus, which according to some, characterizes most students at Pacific, to feeling silenced.

Based on my interpretation of the students' accounts, some identity-specific experiences—for the students in this study, the particular experiences of being undocumented or of being trans and/or gender-nonbinary—included facets of acute isolation, including feeling unable to even reveal one's identity or to talk about one's experience openly. I start, then, by presenting a theme of solitude or lack of friends some students experience on campus. I then discuss how the data I gathered revealed distinct challenges for students who are immigrants and women. Finally, I report how an undocumented student and a gender nonbinary student faced a climate where they felt silenced with respect to their identity.

Social interaction. There are many aspects of the student experience with which Annie said she felt unable to engage due to all she had to manage. I asked Annie if she had friends at Pacific and she said:

> No, no, because I don't have time. I usually come to school—like right now, I'm taking my class. When I finish at 12:35 [PM], I have to be at work by 1 [PM]. But I do have some—I *do* have a student's number and I call them, but it's kind of hard, because in America, schedules are not always the same. Like I would be calling to set up a study group, but some other people, it's just so, so hard for them. . . . And then, I realized that when you are in a classroom with somebody, but then you get stuck every day when the class finish[es], you call [but] they don't answer anymore. Then, how do you make friends? It's hard, you know?

Victoria, a counselor at Pacific, noted this absence of social interaction on-campus is not uncommon and explained:

> Pacific is kind of like a quick place to come and leave. Nobody hangs out. It's not a campus community for them. They don't socialize here. . . . They drive by on the way to work, on the way home. They stop, take a class, and go.

Other students also revealed they had limited or nonexistent social lives at school. While in her first year, Aleja had friends, "but then all those people, like, graduated. So, I was just kind of like 'okay . . .' [but now], I haven't really been very social here because I only come to the

class and leave." This quote suggests some of the points made in the previous section may be relevant to why Aleja (and perhaps other students, as well) lack friends or social lives on campus: Many students ration their time devoted to school because working is a necessity. As Annie's quote illustrates, the demands that come with juggling the rest of life leave less room for the mental and emotional energy that goes along with creating new relationships.

Adult immigrants. Claudia and Annie both immigrated to the United States as adults and cited challenges specific to their experiences as immigrants. They both worked for years before seeking to pursue higher education in the United States, and both started their educational path in this country by earning a high school equivalency certificate (general education diploma [GED]) before coming to Pacific.

After immigrating to the United States from a country in West Africa, Annie worked at a drug testing agency but realized she wanted more. She had completed nearly all of the coursework necessary for a bachelor's degree in her native country, but she never received transcripts and educational history from her school, despite expending a lot of effort going back and forth with officials. Rather than waiting on paperwork that would never come, she decided it would be faster to earn a GED, which would qualify her to enroll in college-level courses.

Claudia had worked in the restaurant industry in Mexico and in the United States for the better part of two decades. She did not have a college degree from her home country, but she had made good money right away when she entered her first career after finishing secondary school. Her father, however, always encouraged her to further pursue her education. When realized that as she aged, she would not be able to keep the pace of her current job, the hopes of her father and her hopes for her son and herself prompted her to take steps to go to school.

Annie and Claudia both identified their major challenges as navigating the world—and in particular, schools and the educational system—using a foreign language (English). Even before she decided to come to Pacific, Annie realized she could double her hourly wage by moving into phlebotomy. She recounted when she first started searching for phlebotomy classes, she was using the letter f to spell phlebotomy. Later, as a student at Pacific, Annie recalled the feeling of cluelessness about certain aspects of the US system of education, and her confusion when the professor and other students referred to the syllabus, until weeks into the term it was explained to her what that was.

Safety and silencing.

An undocumented student's experience. A particularly chilling phenomenon in some of the students' comments was an extreme sense of isolation around certain identity markers, such as immigration status. The isolation was described as being so acute students did not feel safe publicly disclosing their membership in these groups. Specifically, Aleja expressed these feelings regarding her identity as an undocumented student, and when I asked Aleja if she had met any other undocumented students, she said:

> No. Because everyone's too afraid. Like, we don't see that support from the school, and it's even scarier because nobody has said, This is a sanctuary campus." And it's even scarier because we have the sheriff's department here.

Victoria provided a context for Aleja's experience. Describing the environment before the election, she stated that as a counselor, she had witnessed "every year, more and more, it became a safer environment for them." In the first decade of the century, California laws gradually changed to open more opportunity for undocumented students to officially participate

in higher education and even receive financial support. The federal DACA program signaled a cultural turning point (Lopez & Krogstad, 2014).

After the election of the 45th president, Victoria recalled conversations she had with undocumented students who would tell her, "I just never came because I was afraid, and I doubt I can do it on my own. Now I don't know what to do." Victoria said the climate around safety and dignity for undocumented students reverted at least 10 years, "so it became 'back in the closet.' So that's where it went back, unfortunately."

Undocumented students, such as Aleja, experienced a sudden and dramatic shift in the stakes of fully embodying their identities and remaining safe. In her own words, Aleja described her experience along that timeline—how she was becoming a more vocal advocate for herself and other undocumented students until the election:

> I'm an Undocumented [person]. And because of the current president that we have, a lot of people have felt that it's now okay to do certain things or say certain things. So, I can't just go—like, before I was an advocate for AB 540 for [undocumented] students [and] I wasn't afraid to come out and be like, "Yeah, I'm undocumented." But now if I go out and I say I'm undocumented, you can have one person that hears me and calls ICE.

Aleja said that she does, in general, still feel safe in the classroom; however, she is distrustful that the campus or the city will keep her safe, musing:

> In the classroom, it feels pretty safe. I can speak out and, you know, voice out my beliefs and . . . there's a lot of, like, group discussions . . . So, I don't feel like I'm ever silenced. . . . Over the summer, there was a seminar going on about like, "Oh, you know, La Paz is a sanctuary city and we're going to make—We promise you that is going to be a safe campus" and blah blah blah. But my experience has been completely different from that. So, they're like, "Yeah, we're going to keep you safe." But what if one day, I'm waiting at admissions because I'm trying to take a class or something, and the sheriff deputy comes over and they might . . . Like, I don't know, I'm sometimes scared.

Aleja was so concerned for her safety that before she was scheduled to meet with one of Pacific's vice presidents regarding her paperwork issues, she even gave the counselor her lawyer's phone number.

A gender nonbinary student's experience. Moments in my conversation with Jeff highlighted their experience as a gender-nonbinary individual, still developing their sense of themselves and their gender identification. Jeff described the campus as "very binary" in terms of the climate around discussing and accepting gender diversity. Several of Jeff's anecdotes and observations are worth noting here.

One incident involved Jeff's conversation with another student about gender-neutral bathrooms. The interlocutor was very opposed to the idea, pointing to an alarmist hyperbolic hypothetical rather than the central concern of equality and safety for trans and gender-nonbinary students. *A*fter the conversation, Jeff felt discouraged from bringing up this topic, saying, "It's like those under-comments that I feel gave me the impression that I shouldn't talk about [things like that]." Jeff had experienced other microaggressions related to their gender presentation and identity, including being misgendered by a professor, explaining:

> I've had a professor look at me and go, "Of course, you're a woman," which was very uncomfortable. I felt sad, to be honest. It's sad because I felt like I couldn't talk about it. So, it's just sort of like, I have to say, "sure" [when] a joke [or an] obtuse comment or something that can be taken out of context [occurs. I don't believe] we should censor our language or . . . back off [necessarily].

Jeff said they felt figures of authority around the campus should take responsibility for creating a safer environment for discussion:

> I just think that part of it is we have these discussions. And me being a student. I can't bring up that we should have these discussions. I feel like it has to be someone in a higher position saying we should open up this topic. Because to a degree I feel like it has to be

> someone either on an equal playing field with you or in a higher position to bring it up before someone will really listen.

What Jeff voiced in this quote may be interpreted as a lament of disempowerment. The inference that could be drawn from this quote in that vein would be that on Jeff's own strength, bringing the topic up, cannot outweigh or counter another students' intolerance or the ambivalence and absence of support or validation that pervades the campus climate in Jeff's experience. Another, not incompatible interpretation is that Jeff placed the responsibility of creating a tolerant if not supportive campus climate on institutional agents. Arguably, the potential for empowering action was perceived by Jeff, but through experience, Jeff lost faith that the status quo could be changed without some responsibility taken up by those with authority. Jeff, like Aleja, who was once more vocal about her status and is vocal in class but has become scared into silence in the campus "public," had strong opinions about justice but felt disempowered to manifest the full extent of their potential in the absence of strong, uniform support and assurance of protection by the administrators and faculty.

Internal struggles and dark moments. Despite all of the pressures on students' lives due to material and logistical matters, the internal struggles students experience are just as compelling. In recounting their stories, several students made note of their feelings and emotions, from perhaps to-be-expected apprehension about fitting in, to anxiety about juggling work, home, and school matters, to more grave emotional experiences, such as depression. For some students, although their current challenges may be numerous, they have also survived experiences in their pasts that continue to affect their mental and emotional health in the present.

Apprehension of feeling out of place. The students in this study sometimes mentioned being afraid when talking about the experience of being a student. Fear was often referenced

alongside emotions in the realm of self-doubt, apprehension, and feeling out of place. While perhaps to be expected, two things are important to note about these feelings. First, even students who are struggling with larger material concerns worry about their place in college. For first generation students in particular, community college (despite its oft-perceived lower status and lower barriers to entry) can be an intimidating place. Being in doubt about belonging added to apprehension—whether about interacting with peers or figures of authority, seeking help when struggling academically, or simply asking questions—can cause students to hesitate or delay actions that are necessary for them to succeed.

While ultimately couched as prefaces to narratives of acceptance, motivation, and growth along the grand arc of their journeys, Barry and John both recalled feeling nervous about their first experiences in classes. In remembering his first day at Pacific, Barry felt out of place, "being so afraid of walking in because I don't want to be that person who walked in late and all the attention is on you."

Barry also recalled worrying about belonging in his second year. Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned as Barry dealt with several life and family issues, he struggled academically for a few semesters. He was determined to return to school his second spring term and again brought up this oft-cited notion of fear as a nervousness about being accepted with a new set of peers in the Puente program, explaining:

> I remember when I first came in, I was a bit shy and scared. Because socially—I'm not saying that I'm awkward, but I understand that I have a different fashion and style. And so, sometimes I don't know how people are going to really perceive that. And so, it kind of gives me a little bit of uncertainty to how people are going to respond to me.

Likewise, John remembered the nervousness he had in his first class at Pacific about simply being at college:

> So, I felt very out of place. And being in my mid-twenties, I felt *very* out of place. At first, I thought to myself, should I really come to school? Is it really worth it? Am I a little too old for school?

While John quickly gained confidence after his first classes at Pacific, his apprehension about transitioning to college delayed his taking his friend up on the offer to help him register:

> It took me forever to think about it. I thought long and hard and I tr[ied] to avoid it. But early October came about, and I said, you know, let me go ahead and just get this started. And I became a late starter—took my assessment early October, late September.

For John, the hesitation resulted in him enrolling in a college introduction class on a compressed schedule, which turned out to be a motivating experience. While one can only speculate as to whether this delayed start was serendipitous, apprehension about new experiences necessary for transitions into being a student can be daunting, especially for students with who have no or limited experience with US higher education in their immediate or extended families.

Annie described being terrified of math because of her educational experiences in her home country. She remembered harsh teachers in a system where those who struggled with math were directed toward other paths, which left her with the impression that she was unable to grasp math and science. When she passed the math section of GED and found learning enjoyable, she was surprised. However, at Pacific, Annie's fear had returned. Despite taking several challenging science classes at Pacific, she postponed taking math until very recently, saying:

> Every time I would postpone math I would be like, man, I took physiology. *That* is hard. I took microbiology. *That* is hard. I took all the other classes, but for some reason, the fear of math [remained]. Because maybe my first professor—because math in my country was so hard—like, the professor made it seem so hard. Like, nobody can do like him, and then gave us that fear that we carry. And it's not like I'm doing that bad in the math class, but that fear that was born when we started math, we still carry it today. I can take every other class, but when he comes to mind, I'm kind of like, oh my god, am I going to take that class? But when I'm taking it and on the GED, I did great in math! I did great in math, but because I stopped for some time, that fear came back.

After many years of taking classes at Pacific, Annie took her math classes during the term in which I interviewed her.

Barry is a first-generation gay Latinx who overcame a lot to make it to and persist through college. Annie is a working mother who immigrated to this country from another continent. While tied into networks in her immigrant community, her ties to the college beyond her coursework were thin. The apprehension and nervousness these students experienced is normal and understandable. They and the other students in this study were resilient in their pursuit of their goals for themselves, semester after semester, and understood that to achieve them, they had to push themselves to face new and unknown challenges.

Stress and depression. Several students mentioned struggling with depression. Aleja, Barry, and Taylor all mentioned their depression interfering with their wills to persist in their studies and their abilities to successfully concentrate, study and pass their courses. These three participants also mentioned they sought help through therapy and were now able to talk about their struggles.

Aleja is a student who placed into college-level math and English, which put her in the minority of students who attend Pacific; most students seeking degrees or certificates are required to take basic skills (remedial) math or English. It might be expected, then, that Aleja did not find the content of the classes overly difficult. She praised her teachers and felt comfortable asking for help with class material. However, this is not to say that she found progressing through her coursework easy. She made a point to distinguish that she found coursework hard because of “other factors that come into account.” While it is the case that Aleja worked outside

of school and enrolled with a split day/evening schedule, the first factor she mentioned was her bout with depression in her first two years at Pacific.

To understand Aleja's experience, it is necessary to talk about how she came to be a student at Pacific. She had always been school oriented and saw striving to get a better education as important and as emblematic of her identity as an immigrant. She described herself as a kid who could not wait to turn 18, graduate high school, and leave home to attend a four-year university: That was her dream. After graduating high school, Aleja's plan was not to come to Pacific College. She was all set to enter a private, Catholic, four-year college.

Aleja was awarded two scholarships at a four-year school, but when she arrived at orientation, a financial aid representative told her she would have to choose one of the two. When Aleja asked why she was being asked to choose, the representative told her, "I would never have imagined that a student like you could possibly have a high GPA. . . . We never imagined a student like you to have the GPA that you have." When pressed, the representative explained "a student like you" meant an undocumented immigrant. "You know, you're supposed to have a 2.0 or below GPA," Aleja commented. Aleja recalled she was, "still, you know, *young*, [and] still didn't know how to voice or advocate for myself," so the most she could muster was to ask if there was any other aid or scholarship for which she could apply. Aleja was told to go to the representative's office to wait, but after three hours, the representative never came back. This experience would foreshadow many experiences Aleja would later have with Pacific's offices dealing with paperwork vital to her financial and educational progress.

Although Aleja, with the help of a trusted teacher from her high school, found Pacific as a place to land

> That year it was definitely very hard for me, because I couldn't believe that the reason why I couldn't go to a four-year [school] was because of something I didn't have any control over—my status. So, I ended up, like, my mental health got pretty bad, so I was depressed for, like, the first two years.

The unresolved emotions stemming from the circumstances that brought her to Pacific contributed to her depression. Aleja, a good student who had qualified for a scholarship at a four-year college, had been unable to pursue her original dream through no fault of her own. She also worked and commuted over two hours by bus to Pacific. Her depression and anxiety made some challenges daunting. One of the courses she needed, a social science lab class, was only available to take online.

Barry was eloquent about what his depression felt like, how it looked, and how it impacted his ability to keep going with his courses, emotionally saying,

> When I was when I was dealing with my low GPA, it really played a role with my mental health. I think even just for me to get out of bed, get dressed, come to *campus*! And coming to *class* was like the big thing for me; it was the *hardest* thing for me to do in my day.

For Barry, the way his depression manifested weakened his ability to engage in school, and eventually his will:

> It was really defeating the best in me. And so, I withdrew from those classes because even when I would mess up or have little slips here and there, I would just feel like, you know, "I just *messed up*! Why even stay in the class?"

While Barry's decision to leave school was in one sense, prompted by external events, such as his mother's illness, the need to get a job, juggling work and school, or perhaps by contingent circumstances, such getting low grades, Barry's words show from his perspective, his depression was a driving factor and that the crux of his suffering was the mental and emotional toll those external events took on his performance and identity as a student.

Taylor's had different life circumstances, he, too, had a lot of demands on his time. Taylor did well in his courses, and he stretched himself thin to do it. He was on his own—independent of his family. While he lived nearby campus, he also did not have the support of his family, so he relied on work to survive, while also taking a full load of classes. Taylor's first bout of depression—prompted by his first romantic breakup—also caused him to question his ability to continue with his studies at the beginning of his second year. Taylor remembered that in Fall of 2016, "[M]y depression got, like, *really* bad. And I thought that I was going to have to drop out of school because it was like I just couldn't handle it. I was just crying all the time." He was grateful for the availability of therapy at the Student Health Center; however, he was not aware that it existed until a classmate told him about it.

Dealing with past trauma. The preceding paragraphs highlight the phenomenon of students battling depression and how this can make progressing through coursework and persisting from term to term more challenging. One aspect of this struggle that came from the data was the issue of past trauma, and how for some students, traumatic experiences in their pasts reverberate into their present experiences as students in the form of depression and/or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Two students in this study, Aleja and Barry, intimated in their conversations with me how the lingering pain of past trauma has shaped their experiences.

When talking about the family crisis that led him to withdraw from most of his classes, Barry added, "There was also the struggle of my own depression and my anxiety from past experiences that I had dealt with in my past." Barry's middle school years were filled with terrifying experiences. He came out as gay when he was still a preteen, and he was the victim of a hate crime: He was assaulted for being gay by other students. To make matters worse, during

those trying years, he developed a close friendship with another gay student who eventually died by suicide.

He went through a period of coping with this trauma and the fear of being attacked by being aggressive and lashing out himself, and he wound up in juvenile detention. Through his own determination and the help and guidance of insightful teachers, he wrought a victory from those tragedies, working hard to make up lost credits, and graduating high school as the crowned prom king. These tragic events, however, haunted him as he set foot on the Pacific campus, and the emotional fallout from those experiences sometimes returns when his struggle to grow and learn is countered by the hard circumstances or many pressures in his life.

In addition to the other challenges she experienced, past trauma was also a factor for Aleja, who explained,

> I miss a lot of my classes for school and it has to do a lot with my anxiety. I actually have, like, PTSD because of when I came here. Like when I crossed over. [It was such a] big deal that I couldn't sit in class for long periods of time, so I'll leave early or not even come to class.

Aleja was brought across the border twice in her girlhood, and on those occasions, she experienced extremely traumatic events, including witnessing extreme violent acts, being separated from her parents in Mexico, and fearing for her life. She believed some of the individuals who helped her cross were killed shortly thereafter.

Having engaged in professional counseling to deal with this trauma, Aleja identified as a sufferer of PTSD and was able to talk about it in ways she once was not. She intimated whenever there were news of a school shooting, she was retraumatized and found concentrating on school difficult:

> I got very lucky. So that's why it's been very hard for me, dealing with that, because during my last year, that's when all the shootings [we]re happening. More and more, that's when I started seeing them in schools and things like that. So, I was basically just, like, in class waiting for some alarm to go off.

A month before I interviewed Aleja, the news was saturated with reports of a shooting on the Las Vegas strip, where 58 people were killed and 851 people were injured. These experiences especially, along with others, made Aleja apprehensive of police and authority figures.

While these are the extreme examples of past trauma affecting students, Mary (a faculty member) shared the stories of a few of her students (independent of each other), for whom violence, coercion, and abuse impacted themselves or immediate family members contemporaneous to their enrollment in her class. Notably, women students and their loved ones, the violence had a gendered component.

Stories such as these demonstrate the extremes students must deal with, from the past or sometimes in the present, in addition to the material and logistical issues with which they must contend.

"Why Make It Even More Harder? It Shouldn't Be That Way"

Among participants' comments were also expressions of dissatisfaction, frustration, and critique with regard to Pacific College. Many of these hurdles arise from negative interactions with personnel and administrative decisions and processes. I start this section discussing a few of the institutional areas most prominent in students' critical remarks. Such incidents left impressions of discouragement, de-motivation, and also of righteous outrage against indifference to student needs and against the apparent violation of the presumably beneficent values of the college. I end this section highlighting the frustration with institutional hurdles and efforts to

improve student success among the personnel I interviewed, mirroring the students' disappointment.

Institutional hurdles. In this subsection I will highlight three of the hurdles most prevalent in the students' comments. One hurdle was the lack of awareness and limited availability of resources, of which tutoring was the exemplary and most commented upon example. Secondly, several students also shared stories of rude or inconsiderate interactions with faculty. Third, a particularly noteworthy story of Aleja's illustrates problems students have with Pacific's bureaucracy and customer service.

Tutoring as illustrative of students' perceptions of services. Several of the students mentioned not being aware of a service or program that could help them when they first attended Pacific. Tutoring in particular was a resource of importance that was very present in the minds of the students who participated in this study. Several students mentioned they were not aware of the availability of tutoring when they were new students. Taylor, who became a tutor himself, came to an ironic observation: "So I honestly didn't even know we offered math tutoring in the learning center until I started working there." When Taylor first arrived at Pacific, he called his uncle for help with math. He lamented, "I could have been going here this whole time." Annie stated she might have heard about tutoring when she began taking classes, but she did not become fully aware of the service until later:

> When I started, I didn't really use tutoring because I didn't know all the people that - they were talking to me. You have a tutoring center, you have these—you have to explain to me so I understand—I really only—you know, when you're registering for the class tell you a bunch of stuff and then you don't really pay attention.

Jesse was sensitive to the need for tutors in general, noting its necessity for students who are struggling:

> I think they should have access to more tutors. I think a lot of students struggle and courses but they don't have the resources to help them improve areas where they're struggling. So, I think that helps because the teacher can only you know can help you so much.

During the time I conducted my interviews, there was transition in the management of tutoring. Two of the participants in this study were tutors themselves, and they commented on some of these changes, noting that shortened hours made it more difficult for evening students. For example, Taylor recalled one student he tutored who could not come in during the reduced hours. She eventually paid Taylor to tutor her privately:

> I could tell really needed the help and was like really grateful about it. But she can only come on Mondays and she really needed like more help than just one day a week. So, she actually like tutoring me like she actually hired me privately to tutor her, like, on the weekends stuff, which I did just because I wanted to help her but obviously, like, I needed money as well. But then I would just feel like I would just think this is so sad because if we were just open more than she can get this for free she wouldn't have to like put her money into this, you know?

The need for services in general to be open in the evening resonated with students. Like Taylor, Jeff, who was also a tutor, channeled observations about the students they served into their ideas about how the institution could do better:

> I feel like everybody needs a place to go. Some people take night classes, and they don't have anywhere else to go. And I feel like our library is a great resource to have. Same with the tutoring center we used to have that open until like 8:30 p.m. with tutors, and people still need that.

Aleja expressed a similar sentiment as an evening student herself, commenting, "There's been times that I need a space to work in, or, like, I need to use the library, but I can't because it's closed." Jesse's comments corroborated and expanded upon the need for extended service hours for students who enroll in evening classes:

> You know I think I think you know resources could be open longer such as the library such as the student stores such as the cafeteria. You know these places close pretty early–

> close around seven or eight [o'clock]. And you know if I'm taking a night class that doesn't end until nine, 10 o'clock I still might need some of these resources to be available to me to succeed in the class I'm taking.

Tutoring was not the only service students mentioned as not having known. John, a member of the Puente club, wasn't aware of the Puente Program when he first arrived at Pacific, and Barry found out about it from a family connection who worked at Pacific and was aware Barry could benefit from it. Similarly, Taylor and Aleja discovered the availability of on-campus mental health counseling through word-of-mouth. Nevertheless, tutoring provides an illustration of how many students may be unaware of needed services and how the provision of those services may be inaccessible to certain swaths of students.

Episodic disrespect or indifference of instructors. While overall, students had positive and at times glowing things to say about faculty, several students recounted having a bad experience with a professor. John recalled having a professor who seemed to be going through a rough time, and, from his perspective, changed her teaching style—giving a surprise quiz without having reviewed all of the material and being absent—for a few weeks. The instructor later apologized to the students.

Another example was provided by Annie, who had a bad experience with a professor in a biology class. From Annie's perspective, this professor had an indifferent attitude toward students, their time, and their need to learn the material:

> [H]e would explain for a minute and then talk about his daughter for 35 minutes and then continue and then talk about his daughter. Man, I'm struggling here I'm struggling here to understand your material. And then in the middle you have to stop and talk about your daughter. No one wants to hear that. . . . We like stories. But when you don't understand the material it's kind of frustrating too. Listen to your personal story during your class time.

Additionally, in Annie's depiction, this professor was hostile to pleas for assistance in absorbing challenging material:

> We would ask him, and how can I do—how can I study it? Is there any way you can? Any strategy I can use to better understand the material? He would be like, "If you don't know how to study, oh, you know what? You cannot." I was so discouraged."

Other students also had tales of unfair treatment by a professor.

Annie wound up dropping this class. Later on, when catching up with a former classmate, Annie was told that by the end of the class only four students remained in the class. In another anecdote, John recalled a professor lashing out at a student with a rude comment. While he did not quite remember the details of what the student said to the professor or what the exactly the professor said, he recalled the professor's comment crossed a line:

> Think it has to do with her race or her color or ethnicity—had to do was something with that I don't quite remember. I wasn't really paying attention to it. . . . And everybody just stays completely quiet. And it got to the point where the student herself got up and just walked out class.

John mentioned while he had seen this student around, he did not see her in that class again. No student should have to put up with racist speech in a classroom, especially from an instructor. Even if there are administrative processes for students to grieve and try to seek some sort of remedy, students may not be aware of them. For several of the students I interviewed, they became aware of resources through word of mouth at the time they confided the problem to a student or faculty member familiar with the service.

Red tape, rudeness, and "customer" service.

> For some reason. My paperwork, like, anything that I turn into admissions, like say, like, I—a third course repeat or fall for financial aid office too—like my fee waiver or things like that. They never get processed. And I—when I asked for a follow up it's always, like, we don't have it or we can't find it. (Aleja)

Aleja had a particularly harrowing tale of administrative and customer service issues that caused her frustration. After having been at Pacific for the better part of two years, Aleja had been trying to transfer her credits from courses taken at other local colleges to Pacific so all of her credits could be evaluated and applied to her transcript as she was getting closer to applying to transfer to a four-year institution. This was in addition to other administrative requests, such as permission to repeat a class. She recalled turning the forms in November 2016 (about a year prior to my interview with her), having been told that it would take six weeks to evaluate the courses. She returned in February (which would have been near the start of the spring semester) to ask about her permission to repeat the class and was told it was not in the system. Aleja recalled:

> They were like, we don't have you on the system. That you applied for a third course repeat. And they even like showed in the computer like see your name's not here. OK. And now it's like, well, do you have, like, maybe the paper that I turned in? And, like, OK, let me go check. So they went to check. Didn't find anything. So again we don't have it. Are you sure you turned one in? And like—are you sure you turned the right one in? Did you bring it to admissions?

She asked to speak to a supervisor and upon being told that the individual was not in at the moment, she asked if there was anyone else. The person helping her went to speak with another person but the response "there's nothing we can do" was the same. Aleja really wanted to graduate in the spring, so she was desperate to take the course. She waited for four hours.

At some point, a sheriff's deputy came in for a period of time, which Aleja perceived as threatening and intentional:

> But at some point, a sheriff's deputy walked into admissions and stood next to me. Which, I never seen no sheriff's deputy in admissions, and he just stood there for a good 5 minutes. Didn't talk to anyone. He was just, like, kind of like wanting to intimidate me and I mean, why? And like I wasn't even being loud. I was being very respectful. I mean, you know, I was like, this really weird. I'm not going to move. I'm not doing anything.

> . . . 'Cause I was already fed because I've had, like, previous bad experiences with admissions office. So, I was just waiting and waiting and waiting. And the sheriff deputy eventually left.

At another point, group of people entered the space going into the office area behind the window. Aleja realized this was the person she had been waiting for. She waited for another 10 to 20 minutes, then asked to see her. When she came out, the administrator told Aleja her repeat course form was denied, and "she already did everything she could do for you." When the person with whom Aleja originally spoke saw how frustrated Aleja was, she told her that she would send her to see the vice president of student services on the fourth floor.

When Aleja got to the vice president's office, the secretary looked through a binder and told her she, in fact, was approved, but the secretary could not find the paperwork. Aleja then saw a group of people walk out of a meeting and figured out which was the vice president. She confronted him and explained the situation. He told her he approved every application that was submitted and told her to go downstairs, and she explained why she could not do that and needed something in writing from him.

Aleja went downstairs to resolve the course repeat issue and realized she should ask about the transfer credit evaluation as well. After another 40 minutes of looking, they told her they could not find her paperwork, so she would have to redo it. Aleja had been trying since March to get the credits that were not approved as a result of the evaluation.

The problem of confusing paperwork and unhelpful customer service was corroborated by other students and college personnel. John worked for a time in an office on campus that served students and recalled seeing students frustrated by confusing paperwork. One form in particular, John said, "just had a lot of . . . different sections into one form. . . . I saw the look on

the students' eyes or the faces." He also corroborated, secondhand, other students' stories of being treated rudely.

Rocky, a dean in the student services area, shared a different student's story of frustration with administrative hurdles:

> And she said, "People downstairs in admissions and records, they're rude. They treated me like I should know everything and that I was bothering them for coming to them and asking questions." And I asked her to elaborate a little bit. And essentially it came down to: "Every question that I asked her seemed to annoy her even more. At one point, she sat back and she said, 'You don't know how to apply for college?'" And the young lady said, "I would've understood if there was a lobby full of people here, but I was the only one. And so, I didn't understand why she was having that attitude."

Rocky further explained this student was coming to college for the first time after having served in the military. Victoria, a counselor, also recognized paperwork could be an impediment to students' progress: "There's some challenges that we put the students through that there's no need. There's just no need to have a paper that needs to be signed by certain people."

Students' reactions to institutional hurdles. It is important to highlight the effect experiences of disappointment and mistreatment have on the students. Negative interactions with faculty or other personnel often have the effect of discouraging students. Some of the students interviewed expressed disappointment or indignation, articulating a perspective that highlighted the offensiveness of institutional obliviousness to student realities and disconnection between institutional values and actions.

Discouragement. One effect the students mentioned was that of discouragement. Several of the anecdotes about faculty discussed in the preceding sections resulted in students dropping or withdrawing from the class. From Annie's same anecdote earlier, she talked about how she felt as a response to the instructor's harsh attitude:

> [T]he way he was presenting his class makes you don't want to study anymore because instead of encouraging us to do more it was kind of putting it like, so scared at the end of—after the first test.

One can surmise then, that for students like Annie, negative experiences such as these impact students' senses of motivation. John echoed this sentiment when he elaborated on witnessing other students' frustration with paperwork:

> If I had to fill out that form and constantly being told that it's being processed or I have to—for the paper gets lost while it's traveling from one department to another department. I just wouldn't want to come to school. I would just go ahead and say, you know what? I just don't want to come anymore.

Aleja expressed a similar thought when commenting about a staff member who was complaining about walking students through certain processes and forms step-by-step:

> [S]omeone could have heard that and, like, you know what? Brings them down or brings down their motivation and leaves. And there's another student that didn't reach their goals. So, it's like, and then when it's time to, like, oh, again we want to help students, and it's like, well, why didn't you when they came?

In these last two quotes, the students expressed vicarious exasperation, channeling how frustrating and de-motivating negative interactions with college personnel can be and associating those feelings with ideation of leaving college.

The demoralizing (as described by John) effects of negative experiences with faculty and counselors were, interestingly enough, corroborated by students' experiences at other institutions. Jesse, in discussing a negative experience with a counselor at a different college, talked about how he felt when the counselor told him that maybe school was not for him, and that he should perhaps find work full time, suggesting custodial work:

> I felt angry I felt disappointed. . . . I felt angry because, you know, how could you know? How could a person who's supposed to be guiding you towards your academic dreams, you know, tell you that the dream is impossible? To tell you to stop your dream and go work for someone else? Yeah, I thought that was a bit disappointing and a bit

> disheartening to be quite honest because, again, you know, I was down, you know, emotionally. I was down mentally because, you know, I wasn't able to pass any of my courses while I attended [college name removed].

While Jesse admitted the interaction sparked something in him—a desire to prove the counselor wrong—it also convinced him that particular college was not for him, eventually leading him on the path to enroll at Pacific.

Likewise, Aleja recalled being discouraged by her high school counselors:

> I felt very discouraged from the faculty and staff at my high school. In fact, my college counselor from high school told me that I would never amount to anything because of my status. And that was the same day when I was going to apply to UCs, and I decided not to because, you know, like, even though you believe in, you know, have, like, and you have all these, like, people telling you can't do it like it gets to you.

These examples illustrate the powerful repelling effect interactions can have on students. The effects of such unpleasant experiences go beyond having to take a single class another term or hours of frustration resubmitting forms. These student impressions suggest such experiences are discouraging, even demoralizing, to students and may very easily contribute to students' crucial decisions about their academic futures and whether to continue or give up.

Disappointment and righteous indignation. The other response students had to negative experiences at Pacific was to recognize them as signs of a gap between the institution's purported values and its actions.

One element of the outrage students expressed was to reject the implicit disregard and dismissal of students, their reality, and their humanity that underlied the explicit rude act. After recounting her ordeal with her administrative paperwork, Aleja highlighted community college is already difficult and it was wrong to wantonly add to that difficulty:

> [T]hey're like, "Well, it happened to other students," and I'm like, "Well, that's an even a more alarming thing." Like, why is this happening? Like, it's already hard for community

> college students to achieve their goals. And, you know, stayed within their route of completing that goal. Like, why make it even more harder? It shouldn't be that way.

In response to another instance of obliviousness to student's needs, Jeff similarly expressed anger and puzzlement upon recollection of a training for students in which one of the trainers seemed to be criticizing students at the college who came to class unmotivated and unprepared:

> [T]hey kept saying, like, they didn't have pencils. They didn't have a backpack, didn't have paper. They didn't have a textbook, and it's like, our textbooks are sometimes $200. People already spent hundreds of dollars on the classes, and people who come here, they came here for a reason. So that's just how I feel about it.

Jeff's reaction to this was "a weird combination of sadness and anger. Anger, like, disbelief follows." Elaborating on this, Jeff reflected a sensitivity and sense of empathy for the plight of students and a sense of dumbfoundedness at the demonstrated absence of empathy: "Disbelief that it's almost, like, they didn't think about it for a moment. Like why can't someone get a $200 textbook? When some of our students say, 'I can't even buy food today.'" Taylor was a tutor, like Jeff, and was also exposed to the diversity of students at Pacific and the needs of those who sought help for tutoring. "We're not helping students that need the most help," Taylor stated plainly. He said:

> These students matter. And if you don't if you don't show your students that come, like, your nontraditional students that come during nontraditional hours that they matter by finding the resources to help them, then how are they going to feel like they matter in the grand scheme of things? Like, if they want to drop out, like, what's going to stop them? I feel like it's just so important to retention to have these resources open for the people who need them.

As to what is needed for the students at Pacific, Jeff expounded:

> [L]ike, just on a grander scheme, if you can't afford to feed yourself or if you can't afford to get the book, you're not going to do very well in your class. So, I feel like if we were more understanding of that, we'd be able to help our students better. Like, even just

> having like snacks and the tutoring center, like, I know eating before a test can help make all the difference. Or having water or something. And some people, they don't get the textbook in time for the first test. Having somebody there being able to share the books with them so that they can use it. I know we have it in our desks. Like, we have a cabinet with all the textbooks. But you can't take that home. You can't study it. They have to take pictures or something. And there is a difference I feel like between actually holding a book and just looking through photos and phone.

Another comment of Jeff's highlighted another facet of this line of critique: the responsibility of institutional actors:

> I just think that part of it is we have these discussions, and me being a student, I can't bring up that we should have these discussions. I feel like it has to be someone in a higher position saying, "We should open up this topic." Because to a degree, I feel like it has to be someone either on an equal playing field with you or in a higher position to bring it up before someone will really listen.

An implicit strain in this quote is that, in contrast to the quotes in which Jeff had advocated for fellow students, here, Jeff made a plea for institutional actors to take responsibility for creating the environment Jeff needs to feel safe as a nonbinary student at Pacific.

Another element to students' righteous responses to perceived mistreatment and misalignment between action and values was suspicion about the college's motives. Aleja was for the most part convinced the college did not really want to help students:

> This is how I feel, like, the college itself is, like, "Yes, like, you know, we're providing all these resources to students." Blah blah, on paper. You know, it sounds great, but when it comes to actually having those students take advantage of those resources, like, I feel like it's not there, like, they're not—Like you never hear people say, "Like, oh well, we have tutoring here." And if you do, it's very brief, but it's not really—Or you know, you see students struggling, but nobody like goes out and be, like, we have this or we have that. Or you don't see, like—I don't know, like, I feel like it's not.

Aleja's take on the college's Dream Center (a center to provide support for undocumented students) is another example. Initially the Dream Center was put in a very conspicuous location near the campus entrance, "which is like the worst place we can put it in just because anybody

can see that," Aleja commented, at a time when the issue of security of undocumented individuals anywhere in the United States was in question. While it was eventually moved, and perhaps because of the awkwardness around its debut and the absence of a statement about sanctuary status by the college up to that point, Aleja had doubts about the college's sincerity in supporting undocumented students, saying,

> The only reason why they had the Dream Center is because someone from [the community college district] was, like, "You need to have it." It's not because Pacific actually wanted to have one. It feels like the only reason they put it is because someone at the top said, "You need to have it." So it doesn't feel, like, from the center. It's, like, "Yeah, we want to help you," but actions speak louder. And I don't see anyone doing anything really.

When I asked Aleja what she would change at Pacific, she explicitly highlighted the disconnect between stated values and actions:

> Actually implement what they believe in or what they tell us. . . . I don't know because, like, I always—Every time I go and say, "Yeah, we want to help the students," but it's, like, I feel like before they actually help us, there's like little rocks put in our way.

In the reorganization of the library and tutoring services and staff, Taylor drew parallels to the larger political climate and the core values of the institution at play:

> But, like, I just feel like the more everything is connected, you know, like, in a lot of the—a lot of the things that we see like in government. We're starting to see in education as well. Like, we're starting to see like that. I feel like that conservatism when it comes to, like, money. Like, I feel like the government right now is trying to take away resources from the people who need it most in order to save money. And if this is happening just on like in a microcosm version in the tutoring center, like, I feel like we're like, "Oh well, we're not getting that many students so that we should just close it." And it's like, well, just because we're not giving them any students is—I mean, we should close it, maybe we should have less tutors. But like, obviously we're still getting students, and those students need help. Like, the students aren't just coming in for nothing.

In these comments, Taylor, like Aleja, also questioned the college's commitment to helping students who need help. He suggested providing resources to students that need them has lost precedence to "saving money" in this scenario.

Shared disappointment.[4] A common thread in the interviews I conducted with institutional agents was a similar sense of disappointment and indignation about the institution's shortcomings.

Good intentions. The college personnel I interviewed acknowledge the collective effort put forth by their colleagues who are active in contributing to the initiatives, programs, and committees that support curriculum redesign, service innovations, trainings, workshops, and professional development with the goal of increasing students' success in their coursework, progression to college-level Math and English, degree and certificate attainment, and transferring to four-year institutions:

> There's a great deal of people who are working really, really hard to move that needle, and they are moving the needle in their classes. (S.P. A5, College Personnel)

Moreover, it is clear the personnel interviewed were also aware of many of the struggles students face. One administrator's description of Pacific students matched relatively well with the profile of the student participants in this study:

> They might be working one or two jobs. I see a lot of students in [student organizations] [who] volunteer a lot and overcommit themselves. They're typically sometimes helping out their family. We have a growing population of students who use our food pantry services, and identify as homeless or couch surfing. More females than one would think. (S.P. A5, College Personnel)

[4] For this subsection, focusing primarily on the perspectives of Pacific College personnel, I have further obscured the identities of the participants, referring to their interview code numbers rather than their pseudonyms.

One of the deans had praise for the effort put forth by the RISE[5] program to address needs that at the time were more sensitive to the individual struggles students faced:

> And in that program, [the RISE staff] took care, at least from my experience and from my discussions with them, to think about the students in a more, they would say probably, a more holistic way. But it's seen where the student was at. So if a student needed to see somebody and talk to somebody, they were here late in the evening. If it was tutoring or mentoring, they had an approach for that. If it was budgeting, they had workshops for that. They had a faculty member that they could invite.
>
> And so you had well-intentioned people who were knowledgeable and educated putting together programming beyond "How do I do better in an English class? How do I do better in a math class?" There's that. And really acknowledging that the student needs aren't easily addressed in what we understand are the parameters of a program or a service that we put out. (S.P. A3, College Personnel)

The focus of this dissertation was to explore the student perspective. My interviews with personnel were not designed to elicit the college's strengths or to catalogue the programs that offer support to students. Nonetheless, the issues raised thus far were not being ignored. However, the persistence of issues of the types identified by the students and the state of progress in improving student success and equity were areas of frustration for the Pacific personnel with whom I spoke.

Frustrated efforts. The college administrators and faculty I interviewed expressed frustration with the sense that there was little to show for efforts to improve student success. One of the faculty members expressed this frustration as missed potential:

> Pacific has a lot of potential. Let's put it that way. And has a lot of people doing a lot of good work. However, somehow, there seems to always be a glitch from what I can see. We can never really fully get it together. . . . I see people with good hearts, good intentions, good ideas. Don't know when they get executed, don't know how they get executed. . . . So I see it. I see the potential, but I don't see where it goes very far. (S.P. A4, College Personnel)

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[5] RISE is a pseudonym chosen for a Pacific College program aimed at supporting the success of, in particular, African American students, funded by a grant awarded to the college.

The sense that campus staff, faculty, and leadership miss the mark in efforts to serve students and contribute to their educational success was shared by several of the personnel I interviewed.

Often, comments of disappointment or frustration were accompanied by a particular observation or partial diagnosis of the cause. Some administrators posed the idea that the number of individuals engaged with work to improve student success on campus was limited to a core group, while the majority of faculty and staff were likely unaware of the issues or efforts to address those issues.

> I'd say that the average faculty member probably doesn't really have the time or had the opportunity to sit down and understand the issues. . . . I'm talking about the broad campus. I've been in different roles where I come across not the faculty who come to all the meetings that we go to, not the same 40-50 people, but other people, and so I would say that some people are not—There's just not that awareness. There's not this awareness of the issues or how to solve them. (S.P. A5, College Personnel)

Another issue raised was lament about the lack of urgency with respect to student success.

> I need for us to go from these platitudes of "We can be doing better" and "We should do better by our students" to "We're [last] in our district in terms of transfer. That's a huge black eye for us." (S.P. A3, College Personnel)

Another administrator expressed dismay about this lack of urgency from a different angle, describing it has nonchalance to or habituation of low rates of student success:

> I think that sometimes we look at our numbers and sometimes we know that they're not that great, but we just think like, "Oh, that's too bad." I'm not saying me in particular, but I'm just saying like a common theme is "Oh, that's too bad our students aren't more prepared" or "That's too bad that they're not doing well," instead of "Oh that's too bad we haven't risen to the level of serving these students." (S.P. A5, College Personnel)

Note also the comparison the speaker makes at the end of this quote. They highlight responsibility for low rates of student success can be either assigned to students (i.e., "aren't more prepared"; "They're not doing well") or to the institution and its administration, faculty,

and staff (i.e., "We haven't risen to . . . serving these students"). Another dean saw this issue as simply the lack of will:

> I'm not sure if you've ever seen a picture of a hand helping another hand up. That's not equity work. Equity work is letting them stand on their shoulders and helping them over whatever obstacle it is. That's what equity work is. Not everybody wants to get into the granular level of helping students. (S.P. A1, College Personnel)

While not identical, and perhaps better informed by the efforts and foibles of institutional organization and personnel than employees less involved or aware of campus student success and equity efforts, the faculty and administrators I interviewed shared students' critical views of the institution's performance in serving the students when compared with professed institutional values.

"Your Time Will Come": Community, Caring, Validation, Growth

Resource-based, situational, institutional, and internal challenges have cumulative effects on students' abilities to get through each semester and persist to their educational goals. Despite all of these challenges, however, students in this study did not, for the most part, see their experiences as generally negative, but rather were able to recognize many positive aspects of their educational experiences. They saw challenges but also support and success; even if they were still struggling, participants related their stories as journeys of growth and improvement. In this section, I recount some of the positive elements in students' experiences, episodes that exhibit care of their communities, friends, and teachers and growth from their experiences at Pacific.

While in the previous sections, I highlighted many of the challenges students revealed. More often than not, the students I interviewed portrayed these challenges in the context of an overarching narrative of positive change. I began the chapter with Barry, who characterized his

time at Pacific as a series of ebbs and flows: negative emotions and events—from worry about fitting in, to family crisis—buffeted by episodes of support, self-awareness, and growth.

This section, then, begins with the domains Yosso (2005) identified as familial and social capital, exhibiting how students received support from their home communities—family, friends, and supportive teachers—to help them start and steady their college careers. I then discuss how students talked about their growth and development, followed by how they conceived of their growth and development. Next, I highlight how students talked about the communities of support they found during their time at Pacific and how those communities have been meaningful to participants' growth and perseverance. Several students mentioned participating in communities intentionally constructed as part of student service programs and interventions and how valuable these programs were to their persistence in college. These stories are followed by students' comments about the influence of individual institutional agents (e.g., teaching faculty, counselors, and staff) on their academic trajectories.

Students' family, personal, and community networks of support. For several of the students in this study, family, friendships, and other connections made through students' home communities were vital sources of support, particularly in students' stories of access to college. The students I interviewed more often credited the help of extended family, friends, and teachers in helping them find their way to Pacific than members of their immediate families.

Taylor found himself shut out by his religious family after coming out as gay, so he went to see his extended family, who lived in a border community in Mexico. While they did not have much money, they pooled resources and encouraged him to leave his hometown, go to college, and apply for financial aid. When Taylor started taking courses at Pacific, he was not aware of

tutoring and other services for help. Taylor's sole uncle, who had graduated college, lived on the California side of the border, near the rest of his extended family and helped Taylor with his math homework remotely, sometimes even sending snapshots of math problems back and forth.

John's journey to Pacific was facilitated by a friend who was attending the institution. After having completed five years of military service, John worked for several years and sometimes commuted very long distances. He decided the life he had, particularly his work life, was not the life he wanted. He wanted to pursue his education but was not sure about how to get started. John's friend brought him to Pacific, walked him around campus, and helped him enroll. The semester had already started, but John took a part-time load, including a counseling class intended to help students acclimate to college.

High school teachers also factored into the stories of students entering Pacific. While Aleja expressed a somewhat negative view of her high school in general, one of the bright spots was her political science teacher, who helped her through college applications in her senior year. After Aleja's dream of attending a four-year institution was dashed, this same instructor suggested she apply to Pacific. This teacher had attended Pacific himself and told her about the college as a good second option. She remembered, "He told me, 'I actually went to Pacific! It's a good option. You should just go there. It's very small, like there's not that many students. It would be perfect for you while you transition.'"

Aleja applied with alacrity, recalling, "I was very desperate because it was like only a week or two before class started." While there was a community college closer to Aleja's house, her previous experience had left her with a bad impression of dealing with institutions brand new

to her, so given her desperation and limited options, she was grateful for her former teacher's suggestion.

Barry's story of starting college at Pacific shared similarities with John's and Aleja's in that it involved the intervention of a teacher and a family friend. Barry was attacked in a hate-motivated assault as a preteen and later lost a close friend. He spent time in juvenile detention, dealt with a three-digit credit deficit, and eventually went to continuation school, returning to his high school and becoming an involved student. Barry was on the verge of graduating at the end of his senior year but was still without any notion that he would or should think about planning for college. Among the several encouraging teachers that helped him during his teen years, his math teacher pushed him to apply to college:

> I was really close to a math teacher. . . . She was the one who really told me to get involved in college and [she] sat down with me and filled out the application for Pacific College and really was a first person who I thought really believed in me and really believed that I could be something.

Upon applying to Pacific, a family friend who worked at the college notified Barry about the Summer Bridge program. Barry explained:

> I had heard about Summer Bridge because one of the people that was in the recruitment office, I personally know [through] family, and she happened to see my email. When I emailed the Summer Bridge, she picked mine out and she reached out to me, and that's how she kind of reeled me in.

This individual also informed Barry about the Puente program. Summer Bridge and Puente were critical pillars of support in Barry's transition to college and supporting him in his first few years.

For some of participants the camaraderie that buoyed their emotional health came from other sources, such as a tight group of friends, a study group, or a place of employment. In his

freshman year, Barry was forced to get a job to help his family in the midst of his parents' medical crisis. For Barry, having to get this job came as a blessing in disguise because of the community he felt among his work colleagues:

> I felt like they really played a role in learning how to remedy my depression, learning how to remedy my anxiety because it was a really supportive environment. Whether they knew you or not, we were all there to work together, have a good time, serve these customers—just create a very positive atmosphere. Because, you know, when customers are coming in, they're coming out to lunch out of an intense meeting or an intense day or weekend, and they're coming in here to reinvigorate themselves, to rejuvenate themselves, have, you know, a cup of coffee, grab a little coffee cake or a little breakfast sandwich, and get on their way. And so, when they come in here, our goal is to really provide them with good service and stuff. And so, this company has really played a role in my life where I was able to be more positive and stronger for myself because I really look forward to going to work every day and just being in that environment and being able to get to enjoy and be a part of it was good for me.

While Maritza's path differed from the other students—her experience with Pacific was as a high school student and a part-time summer student enrolled at a four-year university—her discussion of her family's support aligned with the other students' stories. Maritza's parents attended Pacific themselves, and her older brother was currently enrolled as a student at the time of our interview. Maritza had help applying to four-year colleges from her cousin, who graduated from a UC campus, gave her advice on writing her admissions essay, and advised her to apply for EOPS. The class Maritza took at Pacific was recommended by her brother, who had been attending Pacific for the past five years. He had been accepted to a school on the East Coast, but it was too expensive, and so he enrolled at Pacific. Maritza's high school counselor helped her apply for the class at Pacific and encouraged her, supporting the notion that it would be beneficial to take some of her general education classes there.

Caretaking and the bidirectionality of support. As mothers in or beyond their 40s who immigrated to the United States as adults, Claudia and Annie demonstrated the added dimension

of caretaking in their comments about receiving support. Annie exemplified this in the advice she gave to her extended family who had recently arrived in the United States:

> I have my niece here at Pacific. I have my brother here at Pacific. And, you see, I love Pacific. My brother came to San Benedicto [Community College]. I made him transfer down here. . . . [We constantly talk about] study, study, study, study to get where you want to go because I told them, "You will see a lot of people here and they don't really know what to do. They don't really know what they want in life. They just come because they need to come, [but] if you guys do that, it's a waste of time. You'd be wasting your time. You have to have your Plan A and your Plan B in order for you to move forward."

Like Maritza's family members, Annie passed on wisdom she gained from her long and hard-fought journey to and through community college education. Conversely, when Annie talked about the support she received from her community, she emphasized her role as a parent, and insisted, "I have great support! I can always rely on somebody. If I'm late to pick up, I can call somebody [who] can go pick up my child or my husband."

As emphasized earlier in this chapter, the necessity of work, health, and other demands restricted the degree to which students enrolled and engaged on campus. For Annie, parental responsibilities were paramount. While her continued enrollment suggested a strong will to persist as a student, tangible support was undoubtedly key in bolstering her choice to stay in college in pursuit of a bachelor's degree.

Claudia referred to tangible support necessary to continue her educational pursuits when she decided to attend Pacific full-time. One factor in her decision making was the added financial support of having found a partner with whom she and her son felt secure. Another aspect of this decision was the emotional toll in handling all of her responsibilities. Claudia highlighted the support she received from her family:

> I didn't want to disappoint . . . my boyfriend, my family, my son. At the same time, they were helpful! Especially my son was very helpful. He goes "Mom, even though you have

> a C or B on a test, that doesn't define you. I see you're trying; I see you're asking, so give yourself some credit." So, finding a little bit more confidence in myself was the important part of trying to balance that, but then I learned not to feel that way. I had to invest more time at school and less time at work.

This quote illustrates that in addition to her boyfriend and family, Claudia's son was a source of moral encouragement and supportive perspective in a pivotal moment. Like Annie's story, Claudia's anecdote shows students provided and received support in family and community networks and obtained encouragement and caring from individuals in their care.

There was not a uniform picture of familial and community support. For some of the students whose immediate families were ambivalent or unsupportive of their decisions to attend college (e.g., Barry and Taylor), extended family and friends provided needed support at critical junctures for these students.

Several of the students found their way to Pacific through personal first-, second-, or third-degree connections to Pacific (e.g., "My friend attended Pacific." "My family's friend attended Pacific." "My parents attended Pacific."). Annie received support from her network of immigrant women and gave back to her friends and younger relatives. Claudia raised a child who would be enrolling in a four-year university the same year she would and who had provided moral support for her journey, just as she had for him. Barry, Jeff, John, and Taylor all provided service in some way and contributed to communities that help support other students.

As the students I interviewed became acclimated to Pacific, some of them continued to draw upon familial and social capital, as explicated in Yosso's (2005) framework. Some participants found support in intentional communities structured to provide them with validation that their struggles, experiences, and aspirations were shared by others. Other students found supportive communities through their work. Given the struggles and challenges with which

students must contend, emotional support is key, and supportive communities prominent in students' lives during their time at Pacific are the topic of the next section.

Institutional support programs. A pattern in several students' comments was the importance of supportive communities in which they participated as part of their engagement on campus at Pacific or their place of employment. Students who took advantage of specially funded programs designed to cater to particular subpopulations who are new to college or have been historically excluded from college (e.g., racially/ethnically minoritized students or first-generation students) noted their appreciation for the community fostered in such programs.

There are a number of programs intended to provide support for students, particularly students who are members of populations that are historically underrepresented or underresourced, (e.g., African American students, Hispanic/Latinx students, first generation students, foster youth). Programs at Pacific in which participants brought up repeatedly were Puente, RISE, TRiO, and EOPS. Each of these programs provides students with educational supports which may include services such as (depending on the program) additional counseling, outreach, mentoring, workshops, and cohorted or quasi-cohorted instruction to students based on some criteria of educational need or affinity. EOPS and Puente were developed in California (EOPS derived from a late-1960s equal opportunity legislative effort, Puente was originally developed by community college faculty and personnel in the early 1980s); TRiO (not an acronym) is a federal program that serves a number of populations (e.g. first-generation students, low income students, among others); RISE is a grant-funded program at Pacific aimed at increasing outcomes particularly for African American students.

At Pacific and other community colleges across the state, programs like these offer supports for helping certain populations of students get through college and to receive information about the goal of transferring to a four-year institution. Jesse described some of the practical benefits accrued from the TRiO program:

> The TRiO program, you know, helps me in terms of formulating a plan—an academic plan to get me from the community college level to transferring to the UC level to take upper division courses. Also, they provide tutoring as well. So, I went there for tutoring, and also they have been providing free field trips. So, they were able to take us to [several UC campuses], just to kind of give us students a perspective of what our goals are or what this is that you're working for and towards. So, just kind of seeing a preview of the school that I want to attend really motivates me, you know? Because otherwise I don't think I would've seen UC Santa Barbara until I applied for it.

Such programs also offer support to students in subtle and implicit ways, educating students about the culture and logistics of getting through college and providing community for students who share experiences they, the college, and society may not see as congruent with success in college.

Barry talked about how he felt before starting at Pacific and how the Summer Bridge program eased his concerns about attending college with his background as a child of Latinx immigrants by providing a community:

> I think [I was] feeling so lost, feeling a little bit misguided walking into this. And I think that was what really made us connect more, and that's what really made us bond more and feel more comfortable with each other because we connected on that.

As he continued his journey, the Puente program served a similar role:

> It was genuine. Like, if we need to talk about personal problems or if we needed help with this or we're going to go study and we all wanted to share a room, we would all share a room if we were all going to stay late. We were all here on campus. We would all have a group message and be like, "Hey, who's on campus? Who's ready to do this?" That's really how it was. And so, for me to have that support from them and interact and bond with them meant a lot to me. And it still does because I still carry those friendships.

Experiences of support and community were vital to Barry's narrative of optimism and personal and academic development:

> So, Puente has played a very key role for me coming into Pacific College. It's played a very prominent one. It's a very high one for me. Because without this program, I don't think I would see myself where I am now. And I don't think it would help me mold me as a student, the way that I am now, with the mind that I have now.

Another program of which Barry and Jesse took advantage was the RISE program. For Barry, RISE provided an additional community of care that supplemented the support and encouragement he received from Puente. Jesse was also grateful for the RISE program, which houses Pacific's food pantry. While Jesse's choice to work part time and attend school full time was successful as measured by his progress toward graduating, he intimated he struggled financially and sometimes went hungry, saying, "So, you know, through RISE, they are able to, I guess, feed you and provide you with food to keep you going, to give you nourishment." Institutional support programs, then, in addition to creating the conditions for both formal and informal communities of supportive peers, also provide academic support and guidance through tutoring and augmented access to counseling, and may even supply other more essential needs students have, such as food.

In some cases, community came in the form of work study, as it did for Taylor, who found community in his work-life as a tutor:

> I was working at the tutoring center, [and] everybody that was there was so cool, and we all became really good friends. . . .We would always go out, like go drinking [or] spend the weekend together, like this. It was a really, really nice sense of community that I felt because everybody was always working, and we're all kind of . . . just, it was really fun, you know?

Such communities of support create a sense of belonging that can be essential to a student's sense of wellbeing. For Barry, finding supportive communities helped him to cope with

depression and supported his fight to persist in his coursework. The absence or loss of such emotional support can also take a toll. For example, Taylor lamented the effect it had on him when he his tight-knit group of friends and fellow tutors were disconnected.

Individual faculty and counselors provide validating relationships. To solicit students' ideas about equity and justice, I asked about the concept of fairness in relationship to their experiences at Pacific. Most of them provided positive impressions of their experiences with Pacific, particularly drawing upon their experiences in classes, and assessed Pacific as a generally fair place. Several students spoke about faculty with glowing terms. They were appreciative of the faculty who were knowledgeable about the material and cared about student learning and growth, even if they were strict or hard. Taylor commented:

> They were all really—I don't know!—They were all just really *nice*. Like I've never had any professors . . . [well], I *did* have some professors that were pretty incompetent. But even then, they were nice, and they were trying to help, you know? And I feel like they all really did make themselves available.

Participants were more effusive when I asked if there were times when they seemed cared for or validated and about relationships they had with staff, faculty, or administrators. Several students highlighted particular faculty or counselors as showing considerable, personalized degrees of care in their relationships. A common theme in several students' comments was the feeling they were understood by individuals with whom they established relationships. For the students I interviewed, this support was immensely meaningful because it created the conditions for them to grow and develop and see the pursuit of their aspirations in a positive light: Care and growth were mutually reinforcing forces in these students' experience.

When John first entered Pacific, he took a counseling class aimed at helping orient students to college. John felt "weird" as a student in his mid-20s, coming out of a transition from

military to work, and now attempting a transition back to school after having not been in a classroom in seven years. Feelings of disorientation and doubt were quelled by the instructor, who was very helpful in motivating him to stay the course:

> She motivated me. She kept helping me out. She understood where I was coming from because I would talk to her about it, and I would talk to her about my background. And she kept me in check. And it was just great to have somebody [who] provides you that support.

As a student leader with several terms under his belt, John retained supportive relationships with Pacific personnel. He described the personal touch of the veteran's officiator and the time and attention this individual devoted to him:

> I feel that he is doing his job, and every time I speak with him, it's not a quick "hi" and "bye," It's more of a 25- to 35-minute conversation with him. So, I feel that that bond with him is strong, and he continues to guide me in any direction regardless.

Annie initially balked when I asked if there was a time she felt valued, saying:

> As a student, I don't think I should wait for somebody to value me. I have to value myself. I don't really have to look at what [other] people think. I'm here to study, and I'm here to do things great for *me*, not for somebody to like me or to value me.

After saying this, however, her next thought mirrored the remarks of other students. She replied she felt valued when a professor encouraged and pushed students to achieve in a caring manner:

> Like my physiology professor, the good thing I like [is that] he kind of values students. He encourages you. He wants you to do more. He pushes you: "Don't drop the class. Keep on working hard. Do it! Do this. Do that. Study!" Like this, and any time we call him to help, he asks you to come here, always.

Likewise, Jesse recalled a time when a faculty member gave him encouragement at a time he was feeling particularly vulnerable:

> Professor [name removed], you know, he, you know, really inspired me to continue my academic journey when I was kind of considering, you know, taking some time off. . . . You know, I just was getting overwhelmed with the classes, and I just didn't think, you know, I was cut out for it again. I was seeing my peers pass me by. Just like, you know,

> another year. And you know, he kind of pulled me aside and said, "You know what? Your time will come. You know, just keep working and keep chipping away, you know, and your time will come." . . . And it's, you know, it's funny he said that because you know a week later I met with the counselor and, you know, and she, you know, she said I was on the verge of transferring that I'm almost done with all my units. And if I can just finish off this year, I'll be able to transfer, and so that kind of gave me motivation to continue to keep and keep going. Everything I did up to this point has been worth it.

In this instance, Jesse was prepared to slow down or postpone his progress. While the news of being so close to graduating could have been the stronger motivator, Jesse credited his professor's comments as the inspirational factor that kept him in school.

Both Taylor and Aleja mentioned a professor in social sciences who helped each of them find support for critical issues in their personal lives. This professor also sensed something was going on in Aleja's life and informed her of the on-campus counseling center and other community resources for mental and emotional health. Aleja recalled:

> When my mental health was pretty bad, she's actually the one who [was] helping me get help and she directed me. . . . She was providing me with resources, and I feel like she's someone I can count on. So, like if I need like a letter of recommendation, I know I can go directly to her, and as well when I was struggling with her class, she was very open to helping me. She never seemed hesitant to help and she—I don't know—I feel like she knows the struggle of being a student here, too.

Taylor also benefited from the caring attention and intervention of this same professor, who provided Taylor with leads to organizations that could help him apply for citizenship after the 2016 election.

Of the two students who transitioned from part time to full time, Jesse and Claudia both cited encouragement in their student experiences as having given them the confidence to make the change. Jesse commented:

> So initially I took one computer science class. You know, I passed! So that gave me the confidence I needed to pursue full-time [again], to say, hey, you know what? If I put enough effort into it, I can succeed. I can overcome some of these challenges and

> obstacles. And so that kind of gave me the strength and lit the fire under me to pursue it full time and say, you know, this this might be the right way to achieve my goals.

Claudia shared:

> I remember especially one of my psychology professors saying that nothing should be more important than school once you have started. Like yes, social life is always going to be up there. Many distractions are going to be out there, but school should be number one if you want to be serious about it. That made an impact on me, and that's why I decided to take it serious and invest more time in it.

Following the spring term, when his mother became ill and he dropped his classes, Barry had academic trouble as he attempted to return to his second year of coursework Pacific but noted:

> I still kept in contact with [the lead Puente counselor and instructor] because they understood my situation, and I explained it to them, and they really heard me out. They really were supportive and understanding of my situation, and from time to time, they would send emails. From time to time, I would send *them* emails. And I really—I have to appreciate that. I really have to thank them for still being involved in a way and showing care and showing understanding for me because the support that I had from them was 100%.

When Barry missed the GPA requirement for a leadership program, the Puente director let him know about a writing conference and encouraged him to apply. As Barry described this story, the director's belief in Barry and in his potential was extremely meaningful to him:

> [The director] said, "Is that okay if I share some of your poems with the president, so I can vouch for you, and say, 'You know, this student may not have the GPA, but look at the work that they're delivering? Would you consider being a student in the writing conference?'"

The conference became an apex of Barry's time at Pacific. He did not realize the Puente program was in colleges statewide and that students across the state who shared similar experiences to him were working on fulfilling their dreams through higher education. The conference also connected him to the larger community of poets, writers, and scholars, and, perhaps most importantly, helped Barry grow into his identity as a writer:

> And so, I got to meet a lot of people who have the same passion that I do, which is reading and writing and writing poetry and writing stories and sharing them. So, being around all that inspiration really propelled me to write even more and take writing serious for myself and really not be afraid to be able to let my soul bleed on a piece of paper. So, that experience was very magical for me. I really have to thank [my counselor] for vouching for me, for putting in the word for me, because it really ignited a bigger fire for me with Puente, and being able to support this program even more because it has influenced me in and impacted me in such a way that I didn't expect it to.

This experience was facilitated by a counselor and director who demonstrated care on numerous occasions, including this pivotal instance, to help foster Barry's development.

In the next section, I explore how students were aware of transformation and wove it into their self-narratives.

Students' journeys of growth. As students progressed on their academic journeys, in spite of all of the challenges they faced, their efforts and the supports that augmented those efforts added up to success, maturation, and growth over time. The concept of growth implies a "before" and an "after"—a change. In the data I collected, students evinced their awareness of their own development in various ways: recognition they needed to seek help and rely on supports available to them, realizations as they continued through their studies they were developing academic skills and learning to better balance their lives and to overcome obstacles, and insights that their journeys were important and valid and challenges at Pacific were steps in their paths of growth.

One aspect of growth is the recognition that not seeking help when needed can be a problem. Barry came to Pacific reluctant to seek help, such as tutoring or counseling, noting, "Before asking for help—It was a bit more of a pride thing. . . . It was a bit more like, oh, I'm shy and scared. I don't want to ask you for help, you know?" To Barry's benefit, the Summer Bridge program and the Puente program had counselors and tutors, which perhaps eased Barry

into learning to use his resources to fullest effect. Using a Spanish idiom, he encapsulated how learning to use the resources available related to his conceptualization of his growth as a student:

> Because like we say in Spanish, *boca cerrada nunca come*, which means, "a closed mouth never gets fed," you know? And so, I know that if I want to get help, I got to go to office hours. I've got to go to tutoring or develop a study group or ask other people for help because I need that support myself. I can't say that I can do this on my own because it takes a whole team to be successful really. And so, that's what really came into play, where asking for help is okay for myself.

Learning to get help is not restricted to support for academic struggles. For Taylor and Aleja, seeking help for physical and mental health was an important component of their stories of resilience. Taylor, like Barry, is a gay, Mexican man in his early 20s, and he expressed a similar aversion to asking for help, attributing it to his cultural upbringing:

> I'm one of those people. I hate asking for help! Like, I feel, like, also just in Hispanic culture, we don't ask for things. We have to wait for them to be offered. So, when it comes to those things, even if I know that they're there, it will be really hard for me to accept them. Unless they're really, like, thrust upon me.

Taylor's resistance to seeking help led him to delay support even when he was physically ill. He eventually realized he needed to seek help with his physical and mental health. For Taylor, these were the salient areas affecting his ability to function in life and succeed as a student.

Another common thread through several of the students' narratives was the recognition they had matured or grown as people, and in particular, as students and scholars. For several of the students, making progress in their courses was a self-propelling, motivating experience. The most pronounced example of this was Jesse, who started his journey at Pacific on the lowest rung of math difficulty. He recalled:

> I was placed in arithmetic. Again, I wasn't ready as a student. I didn't take it seriously. So, I placed in arithmetic, and I worked my way up. You know, it's actually one of the things I'm proudest of! . . . Yeah. Arithmetic, which is literally the bottom, right! It's like, they initially start you off, "What's two plus two? It's four." But now, I'm in

> [statistics]. So, I'm kind of proud, just [about that] journey. You know, most people kind of give up along the way. And trust me. I've had my challenges. I've had my obstacles. But again, I just kept walking through that tunnel of darkness, and you know, I'm starting to see the light. So, you know, I'm kind of proud of it.

Jesse told me about his journey through several math classes. At one point, he had passed two math classes but ran into a class that posed such a challenge he had to take it twice:

> The first time, I have to admit, I was a bit overwhelmed, but I regrouped. You know, I took some time to regroup, study—where we go back to the fundamentals of math and then I retook it again, and I passed it with a B. Again, you know, that gave me inspiration that I *can* overcome obstacles. I can overcome challenges and hurdles that are present in my way. You know, because there's many more to come. I'm quite sure.

Despite having to retake the course, Jesse's expression of the motivating effect of finally passing the class was a narrative that resonated with some of the other students in this study. Annie had a similar story when it came to science classes. She described how in her home country, students who do not show an early aptitude for math and science are directed into different fields, "then we already have a mindset saying that I can't do this." Her experience in the United States, however, opened up new possibilities: "Then, when I came here, I realized, oh my god, I can do it!" She pointed out her success in science classes as being a motivating factor:

> I was even surprised when I took microbiology. Oh, I did it! And I have a good grade. And then that made me push myself. Like, I can take more difficult classes, the class that I used to think that I'm not capable of. Yeah. And Pacific gave me that push.

For Annie, her growth was in pursuing her goal, despite her previous ideas about what she could or could not do:

> I'm the type of person that if I start something and it doesn't work the way I want [it] to, I get scared. I got discouraged. But for some reason, the first class I took, I had gotten a C, but I didn't get discouraged. It means that there was something that Pacific gave me, that confidence in myself that I can go toward the science major without being scared.

John's success in his early math courses led him to make the decision to take math every term, "with those [other classes] still fresh in my head, and I'm like, oh, snap! I could go ahead and continue doing this! So, I just kept going." He expressed gratitude about his experience at Pacific because it taught him "what it meant to be a college student"

> as in, how to balance some of your education life and your outside, personal life, and your workplace as well. Me, having all three. I'm learning! I'm learning what it means to juggle all three and to come out with a degree, and continue pursuing that career. What am I *myself*?

In light of students' goals and visions, the constraints of time and finances made enrollment and work two necessary, competing activities. John explained balancing the two defined, for him, what being a college student is.

Barry's experience of care led to a renewed sense of confidence and a narrative of self-determination. Between his second and third terms at Pacific, Barry had a rough year. Barry noted after feeling genuine care and understanding from the Puente faculty, keeping in contact with him while he was trying to balance his academic life with his personal and family struggles, he came to a moment of self-reckoning wherein he "decided [he] really need[ed] to kind of step up a little bit more." Barry made a link between support and care he felt from individual faculty and counselors and his own ideas about academic effort and performance. In his fourth term, inspired by the continued care of the Puente faculty and counselors, Barry was determined to come back to school.

Barry was apprehensive about being accepted back into the Puente program. As a result of the welcome he received on his return and the bonds formed in the activities for that term, Barry said, "I felt a lot more confident as a student. I think also because not only was I deeply connected with my instructors but because I was also deeply connected with my classmates."

These connections were significant because they show how the support provided by the program was the fuel that sustained Barry's drive to "produce" something out of the sacrifices and hardship his family had endured:

> I'm not only doing it for my parents. I'm not only doing it to set an example for my younger nieces and nephews in the family, but for myself. I think I have a lot to prove to myself. I think I have a lot to show to myself, and I think I am capable of a lot more than I think I am, because even now that I'm standing here in this room talking to you, I still am trying to nurture a decent amount of confidence, a decent amount of self-esteem to continue into the next semester. That's where I stand.

While his past and present are full of setbacks and episodes of injustice, violence, and pain, the main thrust of his narrative is triumph.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter provides some insight into the range of challenges and triumphs students experienced as they saw themselves in different lights, took steps to seek college education, and navigated an institution that sometimes seemed indifferent to their success and at times hostile to the humanity of some students, while also providing the spaces and opportunity for communal and individual supports for those students that find them. Thus, there is a juxtaposition of narratives of struggle alongside narratives of growth and achievement for some students. In the next chapter, I will conclude by bringing this evidence to bear on the research question that guided this study and discussing what these findings imply for present and future practice and future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

There is widespread recognition in community college spheres of disparities in educational outcomes, particularly with respect to racial/ethnic minoritized status (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Lester, 2014). In the state of California, numerous policies and initiatives have been created to improve student success in community colleges, among them the student equity policy, which mandates colleges to investigate areas of disparately impacted educational outcomes and devise institutional plans to address the gaps that are found. Despite the delimitations necessary in the design and execution of policy, the term equity, as it is used practically in educational settings, is a multivalent concept that can invoke understandings of social justice that vary in depth and scope (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). In seeking to explore the relationship of these background factors with the experience and understanding of students, the purpose of this study was to better understand what equity means in the setting of a particular community college primarily through the voices of students and their stories.

Research Question

This study sought to shift focus toward students to explore their experiences and ideas about equity in community colleges. The research question encapsulates this inquiry's purpose: In light of the goals of the California student equity policy, how do students in the context of a particular community college define and experience equity?

Summary of the Findings

This qualitative case study was set in an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse urban community college in Southern California. I used several conceptual frameworks to guide the

design and analysis of this study: (a) the success indicators in the California student equity policy as spheres representing the state policy interests of equity as outcomes of student experience, (b) Dowd and Bensimon's (2015) framework of equity as a standard to provide structured breadth to the concept of equity in this study, and (c) Yosso's (2005) framework of community and cultural wealth to understand and mediate student experience with the other frames. In the span of 12 months, I interviewed nine students and five administrators, staff, and faculty and recorded notes as a participant in meetings and workshops relevant to issues of student success and equity. Transcripts of the interviews were coded and grouped with an inductive process. As the students' stories were characterized by the push and pull of positive and negative factors and events, the findings of this process were organized to highlight each.

The findings of this study were summarized under the following themes:

1. "All These Other Factors . . .": The Realities of Students' Lives That Make Staying and Succeeding in College More Difficult,
2. "Why Make It Even More Harder? It Shouldn't Be That Way": Students' Stories of Institutional Hurdles, and
3. "Your Time Will Come": Community, Caring, Validation, and Growth.

"All These Other Factors . . .": The Realities of Students' Lives That Make Staying and Succeeding in College More Difficult

Students sometimes make the choice to attend community colleges such as Pacific in the thrall of tight financial circumstances. Students of all ages often must work to survive or to help their family survive, and the time demands of work and commuting create constraints for their engagement as students, from how many classes they choose to take, when or in what modality

they take classes, whether they have time to form friendships or collaborative acquaintances with other students, and seeking resources, such as tutoring. Unexpected events can cause students to consider leaving school altogether.

There is a sense at Pacific that there is an absence of collective identity because many students are in positions of bare-bones engagement on campus because of time demands of other responsibilities, especially work. A few of the students in this study mentioned not really having friends on campus for this reason. Being a solitary student can take distinct forms and vary in degree, especially for students who embody specific identities and experiences. Students who start at Pacific as newer immigrants to the United States may have the challenges of struggling to understand and be understood using English and learning the mores and peculiarities of the US style of higher education in addition to learning how to navigate college. Extreme isolation can include feeling silenced and literally unsafe to reveal one's identity (e.g., undocumented students, especially after 2016, and transgender students).

Given the variety of challenging circumstances that might come up in a student's life, the ramifications for a student's internal life and emotional health can be grave, and these issues can threaten a student's success and persistence toward academic goals. Many students have experienced varying degrees of apprehension and anxiety about fitting in, belonging in college, and being able to handle their classes, especially math, to the extent that they may delay necessary actions to pursue their goals. Furthermore, several students in this study revealed they suffered from clinical depression and that their abilities to continue with college were thrown into question. For some students, their depression was impacted by PTSD, and tremendous

pressure can trigger haunting thoughts and feelings of things that have happened to them in the past, exacerbating the frequency and intensity of their suffering.

"Why Make It Even More Harder? It Shouldn't Be That Way": Student's Stories of Institutional Hurdles

In addition to challenges emanating from the circumstances of students' outer and inner lives, the educational institution itself presents challenges for student success and engagement. Participants often expressed being unaware of services that could be valuable to their progress, such as specialized programs or tutoring, and learned of these resources through word of mouth. In addition, several of the students in this study took evening classes and remarked upon the dearth of services and common spaces available in the evenings.

Other difficulties stemmed from interactions with personnel. Several students shared anecdotes of rude or insensitive behavior on the part of faculty and staff or were aware of other students' issues with bureaucratic processes (e.g., lost paperwork, long waits) and poor, dismissive, or rude customer service. Students expressed how such experiences were disheartening and stimulated feelings of giving up college. Conversely, students also expressed disappointment, sadness, disbelief, and anger, as they articulated critiques of these episodes of institutional indifference and lack of integrity.

"Your Time Will Come": Community, Caring, Validation, Growth

While challenges students face can seem daunting at times, the realities of students' lives were revealed part and parcel with the strengths, knowledge, networks, instincts, resolve, aspirations, and potential participants brought to their engagement with the college. In

conversations with the students in this study, they revealed not only challenges but also support, community, comfort, caring, achievement, and triumph.

Supports and resources were often pivotal to a student's path to attending community college. Students like those I interviewed may find themselves wanting to attend college but not knowing how to take the first step or perhaps not imagining themselves eligible or interested in college without encouragement and help from a high school teacher or other mentor. For several students I interviewed, their paths to Pacific were facilitated by friends or mentoring teachers. Students found support in their family and community networks during their journeys as well. As students progress through their enrollment, the communities they found on their journeys validated and buoyed them.

Institutionalized, specially funded student support programs were vital for some students, providing a community of scholars from similar backgrounds or circumstances with similar goals. This sense of community can be particularly powerful for students who have been historically marginalized or excluded; it shows them others from their cultural community share their struggles of navigating college. It can also provide stark relief to students who face the isolation of not feeling safe on campus and the opportunity to reiterate how important it is for students from vulnerable populations to feel validated and protected on campus.

Students may also find support from their relationships with faculty, counselors, or other staff or administrators. Faculty and counselors are the individuals on a campus who, given the predictable volume and nature of their interaction with students, are arguably most poised to form meaningful relationships with students. The potential college faculty and other personnel possess to help students in concrete ways and also in terms of emotional support should not be

understated. Several students I interviewed internalized the support they received and drew upon inner strengths, of which they may have been previously unaware, to overcome challenges. Students who were able to wrest success in a course they found challenging or in a subject they once were afraid to take found an augmented senses of resolve as the product of those experiences. More broadly, students I interviewed saw their stories as exhibiting an arc of growth. They reflected on their growth as individuals and as students and their optimism about themselves in spite of the challenges in their lives.

Analysis of the Findings

Revisiting Equity Policy

The current direction for California Community Colleges has been elaborated in the state chancellor's Vision for Success and the concomitant push for colleges to adopt a guided pathways framework. In tandem, a key piece of policy established for advancing these objectives was AB 705.

The state's administration of the student equity policy has changed since the time this research was proposed. With the system priorities of *Vision for Success*, guided pathways, and AB 705 in place, the newest iteration of the student equity policy as referenced in this dissertation is in the SEA program. The SEA program directs student-support funding (designated under student equity, student success services, and BSI programs) toward implementing guided pathways, AB 705, and ensuring every student has an educational plan, on the condition colleges maintain a student equity plan, implement AB 705, ensure every student gets an educational plan, and submit an annual SEA report.

The splash page for student equity in the state chancellor's office recently updated website (CCCCO, 2019b) has summarized the student equity policy and states the SEA program should integrate the funding of the student equity program with two other programs, SSSP and BSI. This integration was attempted in 2017 under the guise of the Integrated Plan and rechristened in 2018 as SEA. The brief text has addressed the "goal of demolishing once and for all the achievement gaps for students from traditionally underrepresented populations," while making it clear that "[SEA] requires colleges to implement the guided pathways framework," hence, concluding equivocally, "It's all about giving every student an equitable chance" (CCCCO, 2019b).

"Eliminating gaps," an outcome goal, is (while not unrelated to) different than "an equitable chance," (CCCCO, 2019b) which is a goal about input conditions or resources. There is distance, if subtle, between these two ideas of equity (outcomes, i.e., "eliminating gaps"; and input conditions/process/resources, i.e., "equitable chance") not to mention the space unclaimed by other possible meanings of equity (rooted in concepts besides *fairness*). While from the text, one may infer an *equitable chance* refers to the requirements of the SEA policy to require colleges to maintain a student equity plan, implement AB 705, and ensure every student to has an educational plan. It is reasonable to imagine that this equitable chance could mean every student feels validated and valued. It is a stretch to imagine this equitable chance and the "goal of demolishing once and for all" (CCCCO, 2019b) gaps in educational outcomes take into account structural inequalities that manifest in so many explicit and subtle hurdles for students. It is hard to know how much we can realistically ask of such a policy when it asks so much from itself and, by extension, colleges and even (indirectly, unwittingly, if not implicitly) students.

Even though this dissertation was conceived before most of the new policy landscape (i.e., overhauled funding formula, guided pathways, AB 705 reform in assessment and pre-collegiate English and Math remediation) was in place, this section of the conclusion will revisit the equity policy success metrics to discuss what may be surmised from the evidence presented.

Access. In the field, access to college is shown to be a multifaceted, often serendipitous, and personal phenomenon. Students take a variety of units and attend sporadically from term to term. Students attend online and in person. Students enrolled at other colleges may take a class or two at Pacific. Recruitment in local high schools by the college has been sporadic. The impression among of the participants was students come from a variety of neighborhoods not in the immediate area of the college and also that the college was not doing well in developing relationships with the schools and potential students in the local area. There are sundry modes of urbanity; while urban, the geographic location of the college is more secluded than others.

For several of the students I interviewed, personal connections were their conduit to Pacific. Circumstances of life led them to first decide to attend college, and then serendipitous circumstances led them to Pacific. For some, this was the closest school to their high school, for others, the closet school to their house, or the house of an acquaintance. For others, Pacific provided a change of atmosphere from previous educational experiences.

For the individuals I interviewed who worked at Pacific, the college's efforts to attract students have not been enough. Some of these individuals thought about the students and found a reflection of themselves and their personal stories and feelings. Pacific's historic service to communities beyond those nearest its entrance gate, combined with the demographic changes and the perceptions of changes in those communities, and adding the technical and operational

innovations and strategies used over different administrations in fat and lean times to manage enrollment as a key to maintaining the college's financial condition, mean defining the "community" the college serves or should serve is a site of contest, and by extension, the question who should be a Pacific student is contested. While community colleges have been encouraged to move from a focus on access to one of outcome equity (Dowd, 2003), students' access to college is, according to the findings of this study, not simple and clear cut.

Course completion. Aleja found classes were not as challenging as having to deal with outside issues (mentioned in Theme 1), including financial precariousness and insecurity that necessitated working while attending school. For other participants, family responsibilities, transportation issues (e.g., length of commute, needing to rely on public transportation), or health issues came into play. Unexpected events may be more impactful for nontraditional students (who are more likely to be working or caregivers) than traditional students. Issues of mental and emotional health, from anxiety to depression to PTSD, can also negatively affect a student's ability to succeed in their classes.

Outside issues can lead students to choose evening or online classes or to take less than a full-time load. Several students took classes outside of conventional modes, including evening classes and online classes. These classes can be even more difficult for some students. Several students mentioned how students who take solely evening classes have different experiences than students who take day classes.

During the period in which I interviewed students, an administrative change led to the library's hours becoming more limited and often unavailable in the evening hours. The campus tutoring hub is in the library, so general tutoring became limited as well. While a campus snack

store that sells refrigerated sandwiches is open until 7 pm Mondays through Thursdays, one student complained about the limited options for hot food on campus for evening students.

Students who take classes online have resources available to them, but, like on-campus students, may be unaware of those resources. For students hoping to take most of their coursework online, managing paperwork can be burdensome if it requires the student to come on campus to sort out an issue. The format of online courses arguably requires more self-discipline and conscientiousness on the part of the student. The predominantly online nature of such courses may catch students by surprise, and lead to unwitting withdrawals, damaging a student's GPA.

Basic skills. AB 705 eliminated and reversed the requirement of colleges to assess and place students along sequences of math and English courses spanning from remedial to college-level, replacing it with the right for students to take college-level math and English immediately. In light of AB 705, the conversation around basic skills courses has fundamentally changed. The intent of AB 705 was to eliminate basic skills classes.

AB 705 went into effect in the midst of the data collection period. In the initial period, there was confusion at Pacific (and across the state) about what exactly the legislation required—if the radical shift to do away with assessment tests altogether was avoidable by a different interpretation. The legislation forced a paradigm shift: the presumption students needed to be in classes at their (assessed and placed) levels was replaced with the presumption that placing students immediately at college level English or math would result in no worse success than requiring they traverse a multicourse sequence to prepare them for college-level English or math.

Integrating accountability frameworks may be better for equity. The issue of basic skills was easy to complicate, given the factors of assessment, placement, and performance in classes along a sequence. AB 705 and its integration into the larger accountability frameworks set goals for students to complete transfer-level math and English by the end of their first year. AB 705 has facilitated conditions for more legible investigation into the question of whether students complete English or math in the first years. By simplifying the question and the routes to the outcomes, colleges can more easily focus on equity gaps and pinpoint opportunities for constructive changes.

Several of the students mentioned struggles with math or their fear of having to take math classes. It was a formidable challenge. For some students, such as John and Jesse, success in math encouraged them to persevere in their studies and gave them a boost of confidence that helped them take on the challenge of progressing through their math sequences. These students' experiences contrast with Annie's experiences; Annie postponed taking math because she was afraid of how she would do. Similar to John and Jesse, her success in other difficult classes (science classes) helped her build the courage to take math. The anxiety and postponement produced by worries about having to take a sequence of math classes may be reduced in some measure for some Pacific students due to AB 705 shortening the path.

Degree and transfer. It would seem issues related to course completion are also related to degree completion. Students who do not pass their courses do not earn enough credits to qualify for a degree. Students who stop classes or attend part time delay accrual of credits for a degree or transfer.

One issue salient to the issue of degree completion that lied outside of completing courses was the issue of counseling. Some students had access to counselors through the programs in which they participated. Barry, Jesse, and Claudia had access to counselors through targeted programs, Puente and TRiO. Annie, on the other hand, did not report having a strong relationship with a counselor and also seemed to have an unclear sense as to whether she was progressing. Annie seemed apprehensive about meeting with a counselor. Like tutoring, counseling is an area for which students felt a need; however, their relationship with counseling was fraught. Some students gushed about their relationships with individual counselors who had helped them or connected with them personally. Other students complained about the availability of counseling or the attitude expressed by a counselor or staff member in an interaction or witnessed. In Jesse's story, counseling played a role in his arc from nonserious student to graduate. His decision to leave another community college was in part due to a dismissive comment by a counselor. His remarks about Pacific reflect his esteem for the benefits of periodic counseling.

Counseling by itself may be just a part of a larger picture of support. Jesse and Claudia were both on course to transfer the term during which they were interviewed, and both mentioned resources provided by the TRiO program as part of their success. These two students also mentioned making explicit choices to switch from attending part time to taking a full-time load. Claudia and Jesse intentionally shifted their work responsibilities to free up more time for coursework. Taylor, the sole student I interviewed who had already transferred, reported taking mostly a full load, despite needing to maintain an at times harrowing work schedule. These connections point at a tension in efforts to increase award completion and transfer.

Participants' experiences are consistent with the correlation between full-time attendance with higher rates of completion (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2017). Part of the suite of strategies in alignment with the *Vision for Success* is to incentivize full-time attendance through local and statewide Promise programs that guarantee free tuition for students who attend full time (CCCCO, 2019c; Community Colleges: California College Promise, 2019). By providing free tuition, these programs seek to also address one of the barriers to students' full-time attendance: financial precariousness.

How Students Defined and Experienced Equity

The research question asks how students define and experience equity. For the most part, participants were unfamiliar with the term equity. Participants who were familiar with the term were introduced to the term in a classroom or training. In reflecting upon the findings, however, I posit we may "read between the lines" to interpret what these students' experiences say about equity within the context of Pacific College. Taking on this more interpretive disposition, I wish to discuss here what may be said about the research question based upon the findings.

Equity is caring. Students readily described episodes of care and validation when asked about words associated with Dowd and Bensimon's (2015) equity as a standard of justice framework (i.e., fairness, care, transformation). This aligns with research from the RP group (Booth et al., 2013) that identified characteristics of support important to students. Participants' resonance with caring and validating support also confirms Rendón's (1994) emphasis of the importance of validation as vital for student development, in light of established research that highlights the importance of student engagement to students' wellbeing and retention (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). Such engagement is promoted, according to Rendón

(1994), by institutional actors in relation with students. Most participants mentioned one or more particular staff or faculty members whose individual attention was noteworthy to them. The positive side to students' stories were characterized by the support they received and their own perceptions of personal growth.

Participants in this study told their stories as hopeful journeys of growth. Some of the victories in the students' anecdotes included (a) learning to ask for help—that it was ok and necessary to ask for help, (b) regrouping after failure, (c) passing classes that were challenging or that students were apprehensive about taking or had previously failed, (d) developing a sense of what it meant or took to be a student, and (e) growing as a person.

It should make sense students would be interested in shedding a positive light on their experiences; however, this should not discount that they make this choice, and that in so doing, they sustained their hopes for themselves and their reasons for embarking on paths of educational betterment. To re-quote John:

> As in how to balance some of your education life and your outside, personal life, and your workplace as well. Me, having all three. I'm learning! I'm learning what it means to juggle all three and to come out with a degree, and continue pursuing that career. What am I *myself*?

This quote lays bare that in light of students' goals and future visions the constraints of time and finances make enrollment and work two necessary and competing activities. That John explained that balancing defined, for him, what being a college student is, provokes speculation whether this balance may be *fundamental* to (community college? nontraditional?) students' identity.

Self-authorship of one's story as a journey of development through struggle aligns with Yosso's (2005) notion of community cultural wealth: in the telling of their stories, participants demonstrated their possession of various forms of "accumulated assets and resources" [deriving

from their] histories and lives [as members of] Communities of Color" (p. 77). As they exercised this capital in their interactions with the institution and staff, faculty, and administrators who represented the institution, students in this study discussed ways in which they were helped, validated, and cared for. Following Noddings' (1999) precept that to identify caring, "We must consider the response of the cared-for" (p. 13), and Rendón's (1994) emphasis on the relationship between validation and development, this section seeks to lay out evidence in these of what Levin and Montero-Hernandez (2009) termed *the caring institution*—an entity that students co-create rhetorically and experientially. Barry said:

> And so, I got to meet a lot of people who have the same passion that I do, which is reading and writing, and writing poetry, and writing stories, and sharing them. So, being around all that inspiration really propelled me to write even more and take writing serious for myself, and really not be afraid to be able to let my soul bleed on a piece of paper. So, that experience was very magical for me. I really have to think [my counselor] for vouching for me, for putting in the word for me, because it really ignited a bigger fire for me with Puente, and being able to support this program even more because it has influenced me in and impacted me in such a way that I didn't expect it to.

This experience was facilitated by a counselor and director who demonstrated care on numerous occasions, including this pivotal instance, to help foster Barry's development. This example illustrates Rendón's (1994) insight about the developmental nature of validation: "When validation is present, students feel capable of learning; they experience a feeling of self-worth and feel that they, and everything that they bring to the college experience, are accepted and recognized as valuable" (p. 44).

The rightness of students' choices to pursue education were upheld by faculty who engaged in validating relationships. This is important, especially given challenges students face, particularly students who are apprehensive about their participation in college and doubtful about

whether they belong due to their unfamiliarity with college, their poverty, or their experiences as marginalized. As Rendón (1994) explained:

> [N]ontraditional students, no matter how fragile, can be transformed into full members of the college academic and social community. The importance of this . . . cannot be overstated, for it points to real hope for students who do not see themselves as “college material” or who feel that college life has little or nothing to do with the realities from which they come. (p. 51)

The beauty of these stories is that they are still being lived.

Equity is an aspiration. Woven through participants’ experiences of struggles and support, I found criticism and longing for what the college, faculty, administrators, or students should be doing. While students’ analyses evoked “rights,” they did not speak to rights explicitly, and in their tenor, rose above mere calls for fairness. The idea of fairness, for the most part, did not immediately resonate with students as an issue at Pacific. Usually, when I asked students what struck them as unfair or if there were ever a time when something struck them as unfair, there was not a strong response. A few students mentioned faculty mistreatment as unfair, but for the most part, they reported things were fair. One may speculate this is an effect of the individualization of each student’s story of their own journey, which, admittedly, my autobiographical line of questioning may have encouraged. Students seemed eager to place responsibility for outcomes on themselves and their fellow students; however, they also recognized some students were disadvantaged by the limited extent to which the college’s services aligned with unique circumstances, often having to do with the hours at which services were available.

A majority of students interviewed were aware of and sympathetic to some students’ needs that, in their view, were not being met by the college. In addition, students’ descriptions of

support contrast with the void of support and even hostility students who felt silenced and unsafe because of their identities encountered. Some students were vocal about what they felt needed changing at Pacific. For the most part, this was expressed in terms related to the practitioner concept of *student-ready* institutions. Students' critiques implied the necessity for fundamental institutional change by pointing to the gap between the college's purported values and instances or conditions of unfairness, disparity, indifference, or hostility toward students. These critiques align with the notions of justice as transformation as well as Yosso's (2015) *resistant capital.*

Implications

The state of California has been investing heavily in some structural changes (i.e., guided pathways, remedial placement reform, performance-based funding) with the aim of improving student success and equity. In the following section, I discuss what the findings of this study may imply for various community college stakeholders—students, personnel, administrators, policy-makers, and the field of community college research—as they seek to study and forward the cause of equity in community colleges.

Implications for Theory

There was a disconnect between students' articulation of their experiences and the understanding of equity as articulated in the equity policy. There is a through-line that ties students' experiences and the larger trends among outcomes that the equity policy seeks to address (e.g., course completion, degree acquisition, transfer). However, these two phenomena (students' articulation of their experience, and *equity* as construed in equity policy) are separated by many degrees of reduction and abstraction. Metrics that define the equity policy and experiences of students are separated because the former is a reductive abstraction of the latter.

The metrics—even the truth the metrics seek to uncover (i.e., whether, en masse, subgroups of students attain particular achievement milestones, such as passing a course or earning a degree, at comparable rates)—catalog sociological facts and reduce those facts to quantifiable values, which are fundamentally different things than the lived experience of students. While connected referentially, they are ontologically unrelated.

The students I interviewed told me about their struggles to pass math classes and to understand what they needed to progress toward graduation, but they individualized their achievement of these outcomes. Some participants connected their struggles to pass classes with a larger phenomenon, but even then, they thought of it as a facet of the larger struggle of being an immigrant, of upward mobility, etc. The policy understanding of the equity problem sees differential outcomes of a process (the state community college ecosystem) and infers an injustice based on ratios; participants did not express their struggle in those terms.

The disconnect between the administrative definition of equity and students' experiences harkens the *access saga* problem Dowd (2007) identified almost 15 years ago. The access saga counterposes small victories students make on their journeys with larger gaps in rates of success that will never be closed if we settle for those small victories. Focusing on stories of individual students and triumphs in their lives does not address the statistical and sociological facts that the community college ecosystem produces fewer consummating outcomes for students of color than for students from other groups. On the other hand, we may interpret the findings of this study as a rejoinder: what match are college and, perhaps just as importantly, state-level efforts for the circumstances and conditions students of color must overcome to succeed?

Implications for Families and Communities

Tangible guidance and emotional support and validation are crucial for students who embody various degrees of proximity to disadvantage and vulnerability. Participants experienced support from their family, personal, and community networks, particularly on their paths to becoming students at the college and in their first few terms. For students who were also caretakers, there was evidence of bidirectional support: They supported others in their college goals as they also received support. Participants benefitted from supportive communities at school and work. Several students reported finding support and validation through informal and formal communities of support, including work colleagues and individuals from structured college programs designed to assist particular student populations.

Some of the students I interviewed revealed insight that students are members of their communities and can serve in a supporting capacity for others as they are supported. As Yosso (2005) described, student aspirations are developed in the context of this network of ties between family, friends, teachers, and relatives:

> [A]spirations are developed within social and familial contexts, often through linguistic storytelling and advice (*consejos*) that offer specific navigational goals to challenge (resist) oppressive conditions. Therefore, *aspirational* capital overlaps with each of the other forms of capital: *social, familial, navigational, linguistic and resistant*. (p. 77, emphasis added)

Maritza's story illustrates several dimensions of Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth. One may presume that Maritza, as her experience grows, will share her knowledge and experience with others in her family. In this way, the student also becomes a node of support in their community networks.

The logistical support Annie received from her network was vitally important to her continued persistence toward her academic goals. Claudia's poignant moment in which her son provided her encouragement to persist shows the diverse ways family support can manifest. In such examples, naïve presumptions about supportive relationships are inverted: The caretaker is being taken care of by the cared-for. This moment also demonstrates that support from one's home community can mean "all of the above": informational support, financial support, logistical support, moral support, and other innumerable aspects of support that may be more or less visible.

The stories of these students exemplify the metaphor Yosso (2005) drew of community cultural wealth. Yosso wrote to counter the deficit model, where college-going minority students are seen as lacking. These students' stories demonstrate that families and community networks had resources and knowledge that were drawn and bestowed upon students by their communities.

Yosso (2005) used theoretical classifications to identify ways cultural and community wealth can manifest; yet, in the participants' stories, those distinctions blurred. When Taylor's extended family encouraged him to pursue his education and tried to pool what money they could to help him, what Yosso termed aspirational capital (2005) became tied up with familial and social capital in the moment of those encouraging acts. In addition, the support students receive from their families and communities is not unidirectional.

The vitality of resources and support family and community networks provide stands to be better understood in the community college sphere. Often, programs to promote enrollment or engagement neglect to fully take into account students who are attending the college rely on these networks to persist and may not have enrolled were it not for these networks. The

intentional support and recruitment programs colleges offer could be enhanced by a deeper understanding of the true texture of students' access to college and engagement with community networks, whose support can effect the initiation of and persistence in students' college journeys.

Implications for Students

Some of the findings speak to how a student's understanding of their own difference—age, lack of experience with higher education (i.e., first-generation students), sexual orientation/gender expression, etc.—can be heightened when students make the brave steps of committing to begin or continue their experiences in college. While these emotions may seem subtle against the backdrop of much more dramatic and grave circumstances, they are worth mentioning to reiterate the weight of attending and navigating college for students who, as Levin (2007b) articulated, are defined by their disadvantages and distances from the conventional idea of a college student.

An essential component of this would be the cultivation of a deeper understanding of the financial pressures experienced by some students. Particularly evident in students' comments were how financial straits, the necessity of work, and other life issues (especially unexpected negative events) constrained the quality and quantity of students' academic engagement. Students' financial resources can be extremely limited, and these limitations have implications for other aspects of the students' lives. Financial limitations often necessitate students must work for pay, which forces them to make tradeoffs, bartering time between work, school, and other responsibilities. This may mean students enroll part time or sacrifice their income to enroll full time. Financial strain can cause a great of pressure in a student's life. While financial aid is a needed help, there can be complications in acquiring it. In addition, unexpected events in a

student's life can easily throw them off course. While acknowledging the struggle is something, in my experience, community college practitioners do all of the time, we need to think harder about how to apply this acknowledgment in the structuring of programs and policies.

Social Justice Implications for Community College Leadership

The findings of this study also have implications for social justice. In this next section I focus on areas in which participants' voices laid bare concerns that speak to issues of justice. If the ideal of community colleges as democratizing institutions is imperative, campuses cannot abide letting conditions that threaten or harm students' wellbeing to persist.

Mental health and trauma awareness. While several of the students expressed discomfort, participants also talked about acute forms of mental and emotional distress, such as stress, anxiety, and depression. More than one student mentioned their participation in college was affected by past trauma reverberating into their present circumstances, causing depression and even effects of PTSD. Having to manage mental health concerns can be overwhelming; students so challenged may find it difficult to perform or participate in class and may consider dropping out of school altogether.

For Taylor and other students, on-campus mental health professionals can be a lifeline. Even if students move on to pursue therapy elsewhere (as was the case for at least one student I interviewed), on-campus centers can serve as a starting point for students to begin receiving care. The findings of this study strongly suggest the salience of the mental and emotional health of students to their decisions, and perceptions about their lives and abilities to persist through school is an important finding of this study.

Wake up! Students feel unsafe! If there is one thing to take away from this study it is the wake-up-call that there are students who feel unsafe on campus. Perhaps the most striking contrast in this study is between the positive elements of the student experience of support against the isolation of students who belong to a silenced community or identity group. A subtheme among the findings highlighted gender diversity and undocumented status as two slices of student experience that felt to individual students in this study to be almost unspeakable on the Pacific campus. For trans or nonbinary students and undocumented students, the absence (or, more critically, de facto suppression) of community is particularly poignant.

While Jeff found community with fellow tutors and tutoring students, they felt silenced when it came to fully expressing or even talking about their identity as nonbinary. Aleja lost the hope of community when the climate around undocumented students changed. While she expressed her feelings of being supported by individual faculty and counselors, she had no support among her peers around the part of her identity that the institution was most obdurate in responding to with fairness, care, or justice. Descriptions of support and growth depicted elsewhere by other students starkly contrast with the void of support and even hostility for students who felt silenced and unsafe because of their identities.

The following quote by Jeff is a very humble plea that should be heard by the entire college community—personnel who have day-to-day contact with students, administrators who have the power to shift institutional structures, and even other students who are learning to participate as citizens and community members:

> I just think that part of it is we have these discussions. And me being a student, I can't bring up that we should have these discussions. I feel like it has to be someone in a higher position saying, "We should open up this topic." Because to a degree, I feel like it has to

> be someone either on an equal playing field with you or in a higher position to bring it up before someone will really listen.

I read this quote as a lament of disempowerment. From these words, the message I infer is that on Jeff's strength alone, bringing the topic up cannot outweigh or counter other students' intolerance or the ambivalence and absence of support or validation that pervades the campus climate, in Jeff's experience.

Another way to interpret these words is that Jeff is placing the responsibility of creating a tolerant, if not supportive, campus climate on institutional agents. These two interpretations are not incompatible. Arguably, Jeff perceived the potential for empowering action, but through experience, had lost faith the status quo could be changed without some responsibility taken up by those with authority. Jeff, like Aleja, who was once more vocal about her status and was vocal in class but had become scared into silence in public, had strong opinions about justice but felt disempowered to manifest the full extent of their potential in the absence of strong, uniform support and assurance of protection by the administrators and faculty.

The chilling implication of these students' testimonies is that not all students feel safe on Pacific's campus to be themselves or to reveal all of who they are. Jeff and Aleja both admitted that in ways implicit and explicit, they did not feel safe. This absence of safety not only harms their abilities to express and develop their full selves on campus, it also denies them the support they could find from groups of students who share the struggles particular to those identities.

Dehumanization. Each community college is a complex system. The challenges of operating a college in an urban, multicollege district come with the accompanying potential for generating layers of bureaucracy, satisficing or pseudo-satisficing decisions, and alienation.

Results of this project make clear red tape and customer service are areas of concern among students and employees.

Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey (2015) pointed out the design of administrative services often can convey a belittling message to their users:

> Other aspects of citizen-state interactions can more subtly reinforce messages of power and standing. For example, Goodsell (1977) notes that government waiting spaces tend to be systematically designed to communicate certain messages to those who use them. Even, the simple act of waiting communicates that the state believes that individuals' time is of little value (Lipsky 1980). Such spaces may also be characterized by few amenities, the use of security, and partitions between claimants and caseworkers, further communicating the limited standing of the claimant (Soss, 1999).
> (Moynihan, et al., 2015, p. 50)

Student-facing student services kiosks where students at Pacific interact with personnel from admissions and records and financial aid, on the surface, bear a resemblance to the space described in the above quote. Students are separated from the internal office by glass. While sheriff personnel are not always present, as study participant Aleja attested, they may become present upon notice. Long wait times can also be common. Both students and employee study participants commented on the issues with paperwork, and ultimately the impact on students. These and other issues raised under the theme "Why Make It Even More Harder? It Shouldn't Be That Way" highlight the main issues students voiced as difficulties arising from the action or inaction of the institution. Moynihan et al. (2015) suggested structured conditions of indifference and neglect, not to mention outright mistreatment and hostility, communicate a lack of respect and perniciously signal students' vulnerable status while having the effect of perpetuating it.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Educational Leadership in Community Colleges

The implications emanating from this investigation of student experience at Pacific, a diverse, urban community college, suggest a number of conditions that could be improved. It is easier to suggest changes than to take up the often complex and sometimes risky work of implementing and taking responsibility for change. Nevertheless, in this following section, I make recommendations for community college leaders and policy makers to consider for their own spheres of influence. Some of these recommendations have been initiated at Pacific before this research came to a close, some are ideas suggested by the participants in this study, and some are among the ideas circulating in the current discourse.

Continually gauge campus climate and inclusion, particularly for vulnerable identity groups. Students suffer when we are not vigilant in fostering an inclusive, supportive campus climate. If Pacific did not feel safe for gender diverse and undocumented students, it is likely there are other groups of students who feel unsafe and silenced. Routine checks of student impressions of the campus environment as can be measured by campus climate surveys are a minimum practice to monitor how students experience the campus.

Broad surveys, however, may not be enough to reveal instances in which students feel isolated or unsafe. Particularly vulnerable student identities need special attention to ensure their experiences are validating and conducive to their wellbeing and educational progress. One practice for enriching the understanding of student experience, especially for specific subgroups of students, is through qualitative inquiry.

Increase engagement with qualitative inquiry. Colleges should find ways to increase or initiate engagement with qualitative inquiry. Through the conduct of this qualitative research, I learned things I may not have otherwise known or understood about students' lives. What I discovered revealed aspects of student experience that were surprising and deserve attention. While many of the issues have been in the awareness of the administration or staff, engaging in qualitative inquiry creates opportunities to funnel this information throughout the broader campus community and structures of continual assessment and planning that shape campus priorities.

Colleges short on resources or expertise to engage in qualitative inquiry should not be afraid to start small. The value of developing a rich understanding of students and their experiences through small engagements can be worth the effort. These efforts can translate into institutional change when insights inform the continuous improvement and planning processes for educational quality.

Humanize the college's interactions with students. While customer service may sound like a banal issue, I hope the findings of this study make clear it is an issue of the most vital importance. This is to reiterate and emphasize mistreatment of students and unresponsiveness to student needs discourages and demoralizes students in a manner akin to the inverse of the motivational and strengthening effects of caring and support.

The analogy of students as customers of the institution has been overused and promotes a transactional relationship between students and the institution and between students and education more generally. Nevertheless, this concept in limited and precise application has value. The college's interactions with a student should reflect a level of respect and concern that

characterizes interactions of a business that values its customers' patronage. In some of the stories presented in this study, improving customer service would have gone a long way in lessening harm. It is not in the institution's nor students' interests to allow hostile service to students.

A shift in customer service may entail not only changes in attitudes and institutional culture but also a redesign of services. Community colleges disproportionately serve first-generation students. As students and personnel who participated in this study expressed, services to students should require students to understand how to navigate the vast and complex system of community college programs and regulations. Colleges should invest in simplifying how students access resources to help them and scaffold knowledge about important aspects of their educational careers, such as enrollment, billing, and financial aid.

Going beyond consistently assessing how students are treated, providing training, development opportunities, and supporting front-line service staff, some colleges will need to go deeper to make meaningful progress in this area. For colleges that serve communities particularly impacted by inequality and prevalence of trauma, recognizing the need for healing as an institutional value may be imperative.

Promote healing-centered engagement for the campus community. This study showed how students with histories of traumatic events can experience the college in positive and negative ways. Community colleges could do more to develop awareness and sensitivity to impacts past and present trauma can have for students and the many forms of traumatic experiences that may impact students' mental and emotional wellbeing.

Ginwright (2018) argued beyond attending to the damage we wish to heal, practitioners should create structures, supports, and interactions generative of the healing we seek to manifest. This involves recognizing challenges and struggles students face, providing forums for students to voice their experiences, acknowledging structural and institutional factors that contribute to struggle, and supporting cultural, social, and political, and interpersonal means for wellbeing and transformative engagement.

Ginwright (2018) highlighted that to have emotional and mental resources necessary to engender humanizing and healing in practice, staff, faculty, and administrators need to be supported in their own healing. Individuals who work for a college may come from nearby or similar communities that have been impacted by the same structural inequities as the students. Education and awareness of trauma, healing, and wellbeing for every member of the campus community and support for healing and wellbeing to progress are important components of creating institutions more equitable in humanity and spirituality if not in educational outcomes as well.

Mental health: Promote awareness and ramp up resources. The participants who made use of the available mental health resources on campus did so with the encouragement of a peer or trusted faculty. At the college level, promotion of student mental health resources is important. Campus leaders can promote awareness of student mental health by incorporating resources and awareness of these issues into strategic planning. At state and local levels, more resources for student mental health, awareness, and training are essential for colleges to attend to mental health needs.

Acknowledge students' holistic challenges when crafting programs and policies. For many students, working is a must, and serious unexpected events present the tradeoff of whether to continue school with diminished performance or leave altogether, whether temporarily or permanently. Institutional support programs can provide opportunities. In addition to creating conditions for formal and informal communities of supportive peers, such programs also provide academic support and guidance through tutoring and augmented access to counseling and may even supply other essential needs students have, such as food and shelter. Acknowledging students' holistic challenges includes finding ways to increase engagement and same-time support and services for evening and online students. Policy makers should take heed that some colleges are more heavily impacted than others in the extent to which they serve housing- and food-insecure student populations.

Take into account the complexities of community college access. The payoff of current high-stakes initiatives, such as guided pathways, will underwhelm if the complexities of students' paths to community college are taken for granted. The students in this study came to enroll at Pacific in a variety of ways. For some students, tentative or sporadic enrollment may result in or be a result of slipping by the college's efforts to provide services. Policy makers and researchers may wish to arrive at a more holistic view of the relationship between access to college and success. Policies and mandates demanding increases in access need to be accompanied with resources to support colleges in understanding and managing the variety of access points students have to enrollment. At the local level, opportunities for students to onramp into disciplinary, personal development, or preparatory coursework throughout the term gives the college an opportunity to meet students where they are, as in John's case. Colleges should also

consider ways to continue engagement with students who drop or stop out and provide incentives for students who may never attend full time to nonetheless increase their units or attend part time on a consistent basis. Colleges may identify and target specific outreach to part-time, online, evening, and weekend students, who are or can be motivated to attend consistently toward a completion goal.

Recommendations for Future Research

The field needs more extensive work highlighting the realities of community college students' financial, occupational, family, and mental health circumstances. In addition, research examining the disconnect between realities of students' lives and responsibilities colleges have to serve students and fulfill the implicit and explicit faith students place in them would help make more explicit to practitioners, policy makers, and various publics the challenges to meaningfully increase student success and equity. Research regarding the variability and impact of structural disadvantages and how these geographically distributed factors impact colleges' abilities to serve students would highlight structural and systemic issues that local-contextual interventions lack. Finally, the field could benefit from deep ethnographic work on the cultures at play on community college campuses. In California, student success interventions are often college-driven; a deeper understanding of the cultures of college students, faculty, staff, administration, personnel as a whole, and campuses as a whole would provide insight into the problems and promise of this strategy and may help elucidate limitations of and strategies to promote institutional change.

Limitations

Ultimately, the process of the dissertation was intended to craft not only original scholarship but also to craft scholars. While in the process, many lessons were learned. In qualitative research, the data collection instrument is to a large degree, the researcher. The limitations of the researcher, therefore, may result in limitations to the research study itself.

Limitations include the disjointed nature in which this research took shape. While this study helped me to see distinctions around the discussion of equity more clearly, there are some issues it did not resolve. One difficulty of the study was the tensions inherent in the research question's tying together of a broad and aspirational state policy objective and lived experience of students. The extent to which this tension hampered the confidence with which I made decisions and executed the research was exacerbated by changes in my professional role during the period of the study. These changes contributed to the data collection, analysis, and composition steps of the research to occur episodically in disjointed spurts of effort.

A final limitation of this study is that some fundamental lessons of the conceptual framework were lost in the design and exercise of this study. Ironically, for a study about equity that includes within its framework scholarship that explicitly implores specificity and race consciousness in defining equity, this study, ultimately, has little to say about race. While Pacific College has a Black/African-American population that is rather large when compared to other California Community Colleges, this study failed to include more than two students of African descent. The perspective of more Black students could have provided breadth, depth, and greater insight to this study on the question of equity at Pacific College.

Conclusion

Despite the difficulties that come with implementing a state-directed policy at the local level, the revived attention to equity at the state level and the efforts to maintain a prominent place for equity in the state's policy framework has given energy to conversations and actions about equity in colleges across the system. The enforcement of the mandated creation of equity plans lent an urgency to the topic of equity, plausibly jumpstarting discussions of equity across the state. Conversely, for some contexts, the mandated state policy definition of equity may have superseded prior efforts and discussions around equity, especially those that took a broader view of what equity can or must mean in order to actualize educational justice. Woven in the students' stories are elements of what equity meant to them, and those in positions of influence in education should absorb those experiences into the collective understanding of what equity should look like and should feel like. I hope in this study's presentation of evidence and analysis, those who are interested in the vitality of community colleges, social justice, and Pacific College in particular, hear what participants had to say and find the opportunities to take their words to mold educational institutions that are fair, caring, and transformed.

APPENDIX A

TABLES OF STUDENT AND INSTITUTIONAL AGENT PARTICIPANTS

Student Participants

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Gender	Year Started Pacific	Interview Date	Duration
Annie	African	Female	2007	October 2017	57 min
John	Latinx	Male	2015	November 2017	1hr 7min
Jeff	Latinx*	Nonbinary	2016	November 2017	1hr 30min
Barry	Latinx	Male	2015	November 2017	1hr 33min
Taylor[t]	Latinx	Male	2015	November 2017	1hr 19min
Aleja	Latinx	Female	2013	November 2017	1hr 21min
Jesse	African American	Male	2006 // 2014	November 2017	52 min
Claudia	Latinx	Female	2015	July 2018	1hr 15min
Maritza	Latinx	Female	2017† / 2018 ††	July 2018	46 min

**Multiracial/ethnic*
t Four-year college student who recently transferred from Pacific
// Returned to Pacific after duration working or at another college
† Took classes in high school preceding postsecondary attendance
†† Enrolled in summer course without intent to continue at Pacific

Institutional Agent Participants

Role	Equity Plan Involvement	Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Number of Years at Pacific (at time of interview)
Student Services Administrator	2015	Ava	Latinx	11
Student Services Administrator	2017	Rocky	Latinx	10
Counseling Faculty	2015	Victoria	Latinx	8
Discipline Faculty		Mary	White	4
Student Services Administrator	2014, 2015	Don	African American	10

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

(Student)

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form

Date of Preparation: September 25, 2017

Loyola Marymount University
Meaning and Experience of Equity at a Community College: A case study

1) I hereby authorize **Agyeman Boateng, M.S., M.A.** to include me in the following research study: **Meaning and Experience of Equity at a California Community College: A Case Study**.

2) I have been asked to participate on a year-long research project which is designed to explore how equity is understood and experienced in the context of a single community college by students as well as faculty, staff, and administrators.

3) It has been explained to me that the reason for my inclusion in this project is that I am a student at the study site.

4) I understand that if I am a subject, I will spend one to three hours with the researcher over the course of the study (including interviews, logistical correspondence, and follow-up).

5) I understand that if I am a subject, I will participate in an interview with the researcher lasting approximately one hour at my convenience, as arranged with the researcher.

6) I understand that if I am a subject my interview responses will be recorded digitally.

7) I understand that if I am a subject, I may be asked to participate in follow-up interviews or conversations with the researcher for the sake of clarification or completeness that may be necessary to progress the study to its conclusion.

8) I understand that all information collected will be confidential.

9) I understand that I will be audiotaped in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me that these recordings will be used for teaching and/or research purposes only and that my identity will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the recordings will be destroyed after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that I have the right to review the recordings made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.

10) I understand that the study described above may involve minimal risks and/or discomforts. Some of the questions will ask to talk about my experience; in choosing to respond to the questions I may experience uncomfortable emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, or feeling overwhelmed. I understand that at any time I may pause the interview for a break stop the interview completely.

I may have access to the following counseling services available:

i) The Student Health Center (Building A-9) provides free psychotherapy (counseling) services to any student who has paid their health fees for the current semester. Students may call 310-287-4478 to make an appointment or stop in (Building A-9).

ii) [Name Redacted] in [Location Redacted] provides therapeutic counseling for low fees based on monthly take-home income. Call [Redacted] for any questions or to schedule an appointment, or visit their website [URL redacted] for more information and/or to make an appointment request.

11) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are an opportunity to meaningfully reflect upon my experience at the college.

12) I understand that **Agyeman Boateng** who can be reached at aboaten1@lion.lmu.edu will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study.

13) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.

14) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice.

15) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.

16) I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.

17) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.

18) I understand that in the event of research related injury, compensation and medical treatment are not provided by Loyola Marymount University.

19) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact David Moffet, Ph.D. Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 at david.moffet@lmu.edu.

20) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights."

Subject's Signature ____ Date ________________

Witness ____ Date ________________

Letter of Informed Consent

(Faculty/Staff/Administrator)

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form

Date of Preparation: September 25, 2017
Loyola Marymount University
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4) I understand that if I am a subject, I will spend one to three hours with the researcher over the course of the study (including interviews, logistical correspondence, and follow-up).

5) I understand that if I am a subject, I will participate in an interview with the researcher lasting approximately one hour at my convenience, as arranged with the researcher.

6) I understand that if I am a subject my interview responses will be recorded digitally.

7) I understand that if I am a subject, I may be asked to participate in follow-up interviews or conversations with the researcher for the sake of clarification or completeness that may be necessary to progress the study to its conclusion.

8) I understand that all information collected will be confidential.

9) I understand that I will be audiotaped in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me that these recordings will be used for teaching and/or research purposes only and that my identity will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the recordings will be destroyed after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that I have the right to review the recordings made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.

10) I understand that the study described above may involve minimal risks and/or discomforts. Some of the questions will ask to talk about my experience; in choosing to respond to the questions I may experience uncomfortable emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, or feeling anxious. I understand that at any time I may pause the interview for a break stop the interview completely.

I may have access to the following counseling services available:

i) [Name Redacted] in [Location Redacted] provides therapeutic counseling for low fees based on monthly take-home income. Call [Redacted] for any questions or to schedule an appointment, or visit their website [URL Redacted] for more information and/or to make an appointment request.

11) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are an opportunity to meaningfully reflect upon my experience at the college.

12) I understand that **Agyeman Boateng** who can be reached at aboaten1@lion.lmu.edu will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study.

13) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.

14) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice.

15) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.

16) I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.

17) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.

18) I understand that in the event of research related injury, compensation and medical treatment are not provided by Loyola Marymount University.

19) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact David Moffet, Ph.D. Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 at david.moffet@lmu.edu.

20) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights."

Subject's Signature ______________________________ Date ______________

Witness ______________________________ Date ______________

APPENDIX C

EXPERIMENTAL SUBJECTS BILL OF RIGHTS

Experimental Subjects Bill of Rights
LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY
Experimental Subjects Bill of Rights

Pursuant to California Health and Safety Code §24172, I understand that I have the following rights as a participant in a research study:

1. I will be informed of the nature and purpose of the experiment.

2. I will be given an explanation of the procedures to be followed in the medical experiment, and any drug or device to be utilized.

3. I will be given a description of any attendant discomforts and risks to be reasonably expected from the study.

4. I will be given an explanation of any benefits to be expected from the study, if applicable.

5. I will be given a disclosure of any appropriate alternative procedures, drugs or devices that might be advantageous and their relative risks and benefits.

6. I will be informed of the avenues of medical treatment, if any, available after the study is completed if complications should arise.

7. I will be given an opportunity to ask any questions concerning the study or the procedures involved.

8. I will be instructed that consent to participate in the research study may be withdrawn at any time and that I may discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

9. I will be given a copy of the signed and dated written consent form.

10. I will be given the opportunity to decide to consent or not to consent to the study without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, coercion, or undue influence on my decision.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Demographic/Identity Questions

If in the writing of the results I need to refer to a quotation you make, for the sake of keeping your identity [anonymous / protected], what name would you like for me to use instead of your own?

How would you characterize your gender?

How would you characterize your racial or ethnic background?

How would you characterize your age?

How far away do you live from the campus?

Questions for Student Interviews

Tell me about your experience at this school.

Can you tell me about how you came to be a student at Pacific?

Can you tell me about your experience in Math, English, and/or ESL courses here?

Can you tell me about your experience with trying to pass your classes here?

Can you tell me about your goals?

What do you want to get out of your time here?

In an ideal situation, what does "the end of your time here" look like?

What does the word "Equity" mean to you?

Can you tell me about a time when there was a situation at this school that seemed fair or unfair to you?

Can you tell me about any relationships you have with staff, faculty, or administrators you have at this school?

Can you tell me about a time you felt valued at this school?

Can you tell me about a time where you noticed growth or development on your own part at this school?

Can you tell me about a time you felt cared for at this school?

How do race and ethnicity affect your experience as a student at this school?

Do you have a story about your experience that needs to be heard?

What do you see as the challenges and opportunities regarding equity at Pacific?

What, if anything, needs to change on this campus?

<u>Questions for Faculty/Staff/Administrator Interviews</u>

Please tell me about your experience here at Pacific.

What role do you currently serve in?

Tell me about any previous roles you had here at Pacific.

What does the word "Equity" mean to you?

Particularly in relation to students? In other words, "student equity"?

Tell me about any relationships you have with students.

How does the word, "Equity" relate to your experience at Pacific?

Can you tell me about your involvement with the Equity Plan?

How does the Equity Plan Policy relate to what you have said about equity at Pacific?

Can you tell me about your involvement with efforts to improve Equity on campus?

What do you see as the challenges and opportunities regarding equity at Pacific?

(alternative wording) What are the prospects for or against equity at Pacific?

What, if anything, needs to change at Pacific?

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