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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Reimagining the Onboarding and Mentoring needs of California Community College Counseling

Faculty: An Ecological Systems Approach Using Narrative Inquiry

by

Philip Lantz

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

Loyola Marymount University,

Toward the partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2024

Reimagining the Onboarding and Mentoring needs of California Community College Counseling

Faculty: An Ecological Systems Approach Using Narrative Inquiry

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by

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This dissertation written by Philip Lantz, 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.

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DEDICATION

To community college counseling faculty, who use their passion and talents to give of themselves to support their students.

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ABSTRACT

Reimagining the Onboarding and Mentoring needs of California Community College Counseling
Faculty: An Ecological Systems Approach Using Narrative Inquiry

by

Philip Lantz

Despite California community college counseling faculty having unique roles on their campuses due to their faculty status and their proximity to students, there is a lack of research related to the experiences of counseling faculty and how they can be supported by local and statewide leaders to best meet the needs of the diverse student populations that are currently being served within the California community college system. This qualitative research study utilized narrative inquiry to examine the current onboarding and mentoring experiences of California community college counseling faculty to evaluate both best practices as well as institutional gaps that negatively impact counseling faculty and the students they serve. Utilizing Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory as a framework, this study intentionally centered counseling faculty development while examining three main questions: (a) how do the onboarding and mentoring of community college counseling faculty reflect an institution's support of diverse student populations, (b) what policies and practices exist, from the counseling faculty perspective, that effectively support the onboarding and mentoring of counseling faculty, and (c) how can an ecological framework assist in identifying recommendations on what supports for

counseling faculty are necessary for institutions to be successful in their mission to support diverse students?

Five counseling faculty were selected as participants, who provided data through journal responses, artifact submission, and narrative inquiry interviews. Findings indicated that a primary challenge for new counseling faculty was the need to “freeway fly” while working at multiple campuses part-time, leading to inconsistent onboarding support, increased stress, and a lack of sense of belonging on campus. Additionally, onboarding opportunities that intentionally combined technical training with cultural competencies were considered most valuable. Finally, informal mentoring was seen as a key component of onboarding as faculty sought out relationships that helped fill institutional gaps in professional development. The findings point to the need for a reimagined approach to onboarding and mentoring counseling faculty in ways that center faculty perspectives to better align with California’s mission to support the diverse needs of community college students.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since its earliest conceptions in the late 1800s, the junior college system in the United States has sparked complex philosophical and logistical debates on the purpose behind higher education in society. Early 2-year college models were built on the assumption that upper-division coursework that relied heavily on research and critical thinking was to be completed at the university level, while lower-division fundamentals and general education coursework were to be considered an extension of secondary schooling (Diener, 1985). As a result, junior colleges, or community colleges as they are more commonly referred to today, have been utilized as a bridge to higher education attainment. Currently, they are one of the most influential systems of higher education in society, especially among communities most minoritized by educational institutions. One of the largest public community college models can be seen in California, where 116 individual campuses work in collaboration with statewide offices and partnering public colleges and universities to provide quality education to students whose goals range from an associate degree, vocational certificate, personal or professional development, or completion of coursework required to transfer to universities to obtain a bachelor's degree. The state's expansive model is currently home to over 1.8 million students, making it an essential part of the state's workforce development and social mobility strategies (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017).

While the California community college system enrolls almost two million students, issues of retention and low completion rates prompted the state to begin systemwide planning and implementation of institutional redesigns and reimagining how colleges interact with and

support students from diverse backgrounds and communities. Nationally, community college students' retention rate is 61%, while the graduation rate of students who enroll in public 2-year colleges is 29%. This means that the majority of students, 71%, do not graduate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

In the California community college system, counseling faculty members play a unique role in supporting students throughout their academic and personal journeys. Through their education and training, they developed skills that allow them to meet with students one-on-one and in small groups to help them throughout various stages of their academic, career, and personal development. This study aimed to identify how ecological factors operating at multiple levels influence these faculty members' onboarding and mentoring, as well as to investigate their perceptions concerning these factors. Understanding these professionals allows community college leaders and policymakers to gauge what supports ensure a sustainable learning community that can succeed in its mission to graduate students prepared to contribute to the larger community in a variety of ways. This study utilized qualitative data from counseling faculty practitioners. In collecting narratives about their experiences early on in their careers, the barriers they faced in their work, and best practices related to onboarding and mentoring that they consider valuable, this study provided recommendations for the state to support and utilize counseling these faculty members to close equity gaps and promote higher education completion for all students.

Statement of Problem

Empirically, there was little data about the best practices for supporting California community college counseling faculty as they engage with diverse student populations. Across

the state, community college campuses serve diverse student populations in terms of race, gender, socioeconomic status, academic preparation, disability status, and more (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017). Community colleges are often viewed as one of the most accessible options for pursuing higher education due to their open admissions policies and lower tuition rates, which makes them desirable for many students. At these campuses, students can take courses needed to start a career, begin lower-division coursework to transfer to a bachelor's degree program, or develop new skills for personal and professional development. With this expansive student population come unique and complex barriers to student success.

To address this issue, in 2017, the California Community College Chancellor's Office issued a report titled *Vision for Success*, which provided a unified, measurable goal for the 116 community colleges to work toward over a 5-year timeline (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017). The plan defined six collective goals, which all sought to reduce equity gaps while promoting timely completion rates. First, the plan called for a 20% increase in completion rates for associate degrees, credentials and certificates and a 35% increase in rates of transfer to University of California or California State University campuses. The plan also targeted career technical education outcomes by calling for an increase from 60% to 69% in those employed in a field related to their certificate after graduation. In addition, the plan encourages a decrease in the average number of units accumulated by students who eventually earn an associate degree from 87, which was average at the time of the initial report, to 79. Finally, the plan created a short-term and long-term goal of closing equity gaps, first by 40% in 5 years and 100% by 10 years, with particular emphasis on both statewide and regional achievement gaps. The *Vision for Success* united the community college system in a statewide

movement to break down institutional barriers while serving students (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017).

In 2021, 4 years after the chancellor's office released the *Vision for Success* report, the Academic Senate for Community Colleges released a resolution calling on leaders at both the state and individual community college district levels to ensure they utilize counseling faculty as integral components of reaching equity goals (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2021). The resolution acknowledged that these and other non-instructional faculty play key roles in students' onboarding and retention, especially those most marginalized in the community college system. These faculty members support students through academic, personal, career, and crisis counseling that is attentive to the intersectionality of each student's identities. As one of the most accessible forms of public higher education, these colleges are innately tied with social justice-oriented initiatives that seek equity in educational outcomes. Therefore, as the statewide academic senate's resolution suggests, a campus's support of counseling faculty in pursuit of closing equity gaps provides an important context for its desire to truly serve diverse students.

Counseling faculty's role in creating educational environments built on an understanding of relevant ecologies conducive to student success and equity is of utmost importance. They have a responsibility to ensure that diverse students are welcomed and supported as they transition into their new academic environment. However, they, too, must receive support to be effectively situated in the campus community and equipped with the resources to support diverse student populations. Thus, it is critical to assess faculty perceptions of the ecological contexts of

onboarding and mentoring to ensure that institutional efforts align with achieving and maintaining socially just environments for faculty and students.

Research Questions

One overarching question and two sub-questions guide this qualitative study:

1. How do the onboarding and mentoring of community college counseling faculty reflect an institution's support of diverse student populations?
 - a. What policies and practices exist, from the counseling faculty perspective, that effectively support the onboarding and mentoring of counseling faculty?
 - b. How can an ecological framework assist in identifying recommendations on what supports for counseling faculty are necessary for institutions to be successful in their mission to support diverse students?

Purpose

This study was built on the understanding that community college counseling faculty and the services they provide have a direct impact on students' trajectory as they work toward their academic, career, and personal goals. These faculty members served students on an interpersonal level by helping them navigate complicated higher education policies and systems. Their responsibilities required various levels of engagement, as their work includes one-on-one services with students, larger group support service efforts, campuswide programming and development, and the facilitation of policies dictated by statewide initiatives. As a result of this multi-level work, counselors worked within systems to provide students with layered support. However, despite their complex roles and responsibilities, there was a lack of baseline data related to counseling faculty experiences. There were gaps in information on how institutions can

actively support them as they are onboarded and mentored early on in their careers to prepare them for the ecological systems that shape their work. Given that California had published resolutions about the need for tenure-track counseling faculty in pursuit of success goals, foundational knowledge of the best practices in onboarding and mentoring them would have played a key role in how the community college system prepared to hire and retain them. Institutions that demonstrate a commitment to counseling faculty simultaneously demonstrate their understanding of their students' diverse needs.

This study examined the experiences of counseling faculty who narrated their perspectives on how onboarding and mentoring directly influenced their ability to support students from diverse backgrounds. The collection of five participants' personal narratives provided the opportunity for them to reflect on the context and meaning of their work to support diverse students within the ecological system of California community colleges. By interviewing participants who had been in the field for at least 5 years, this study intentionally investigated how onboarding and mentoring impacted their development in relation to their work's various levels. The collection of this data and this study's findings informed how community colleges could ensure that students have access to counseling faculty who are adjusted and confident in their ability to help students.

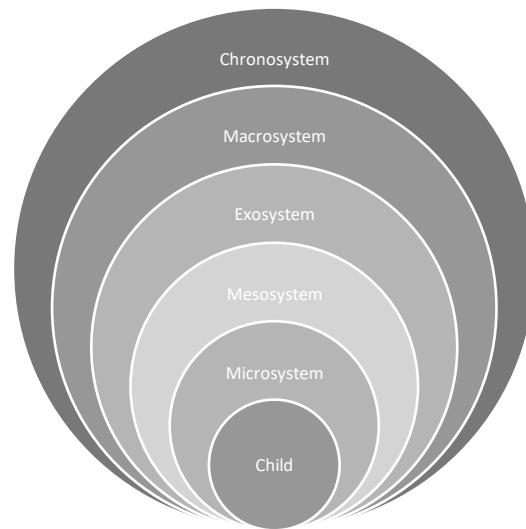
Theoretical Framework

This study used Bronfenbrenner's social ecology model to provide context to the work done by community college counseling faculty (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1979) conceptualized ecological systems theory with the foundational belief that human development cannot be considered independent of context. In this way, individual development was viewed in

the context of the various social, political, and economic systems surrounding people (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). California community colleges are complex systems, nested within larger community systems and made up of a myriad of subsystems. Therefore, using an ecological perspective, this study sought to gain a clearer understanding of the various contexts in which counseling faculty do their work and the support they need to adequately serve diverse student populations. Bronfenbrenner's original model centered on the child, but this study placed counseling faculty at the center of that model, which involves microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems interdependently connected like the rings on a target (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Figure 1

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory Model



Note. Adapted from *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* by U. Bronfenbrenner, 1979. Harvard University Press; copyright 1979 by Harvard University Press.

The microsystem includes the interactions with which individuals are in direct contact in their immediate environment. For counselors, this includes daily exchanges with students, counseling peers, instructional faculty, the dean of counseling, and even family members outside of the workplace. Influence on development from those in the microsystem is direct (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This level includes a series of repetitive activities, roles, and relationships by counseling faculty that directly interact with their immediate environment. The quality of these relationships can impact their onboarding and mentoring.

The mesosystem includes interactions between two or more microsystems in counseling faculty members' work lives, with special attention on the connections and relationships and how they hinder or enhance student success. For example, even if they do not experience these interactions directly, a counselor's onboarding may be impacted by the ways that the dean of counseling and experienced counselors in the department interact with one another to set up training for new counseling faculty. In this way, the influence on development from the mesosystem is less direct but still present (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The exosystem incorporates the larger systems surrounding the individual that have an impact on the individual's experience (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The exosystem describes an environment or level of influence of which community college counselors are not directly a part but which influences their experiences. Examples of influence at the exosystem level include statewide policies and funding that impact higher education, healthcare and mental health services, school boards, and local politics. These influences shape the work of counseling faculty as they work with students at a local level.

The macrosystem includes cultural elements such as socioeconomic status, wealth, poverty, and ethnicity. This system is the overarching arrangement of micro-, meso-, and exosystems of a particular environment within society, with particular regard to an individual's belief systems, resources, opportunity structures, and patterns of social interchange embedded in such overarching systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). One of the characteristics of the macrosystem is that the individual does not exist at this level or environment, but the environment impacts development by influencing the world in which they exist. An example of this is when a college accepts government funding, which often results in strings-attached interactions in the form of accountability measures that align with governmental goals and priorities. These priorities can affect the types of programs offered, funding restrictions, and the initiatives in which counseling faculty are asked to participate. These initiatives might shape the onboarding and mentoring of faculty, as practitioners may require training to be able to properly work within requirements created at the macrosystem level.

The chronosystem encompasses life changes or historical events that can have an impact on an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This includes transition moments such as having children, getting a divorce, having to change careers, and surviving traumatic life events. It can also describe larger events that have a more widespread impact on a community. Examples of this for counseling faculty can include the COVID-19 pandemic, which shifted how people gather and interact, as well as the higher education landscape for facilitating traditional education experiences in classrooms on college campuses.

The qualitative data collected in this exploratory study illuminated key themes related to counseling faculty's onboarding and mentoring experiences that, when viewed through an

ecological lens, could be used to develop strategic recommendations for educational leaders while evaluating effective support for these faculty members and the students they serve. The study highlighted how counselors worked within each of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) systems and how their work requires simultaneous interaction between the various systems, which can be supported through effective onboarding and mentoring. Specifically, this study closely examined counseling faculty's work within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) first three ecological systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, and the exosystem. While the macrosystems and chronosystems also affect them, the first three ecological models have the most direct day-to-day influence on student engagement on campus and, therefore, require the development of baseline data on these types of interactions. Every individual is influenced by their ecological system, and a student's and a community college counselor's ecological systems are distinct but intertwined. Therefore, considering that these faculty members were a part of students' microsystems and have the duty to assist students, this study argued that counseling faculty's ecological systems affect students' ecological systems. As a result, by placing these faculty members at the center of the ecological framework, this study focused on their onboarding and mentoring to better understand how institutional leaders could improve these campus community members' development and experiences.

Methodology

This study explored effective onboarding and mentoring strategies through community college counselor experiences using qualitative methodologies through narrative inquiry. Each participant had at least 5 years of experience in community college counseling. They provided personal narratives and artifacts to give insights into their work supporting diverse students and

their experiences early on in their careers. Data collection occurred via a short questionnaire, collection of relevant documents, and semi-structured interviews. As the researcher, I conducted thematic data analysis to evaluate best practices for onboarding and mentoring support for new counseling faculty. Additionally, data aided in understanding how an institution's support for counselor development within nested ecological systems may have indicated a commitment to supporting diverse student populations.

The study gathered five full-time community college counseling faculty participants from Southern California through purposive sampling. This sampling method allowed me, as the researcher, to choose participants based on their ability to address the research questions and provide rich data from their experiences. While convenience sampling may limit generalizability, it enabled the study to focus on individuals with extensive experience in the field and varied perspectives on institutional support for diverse student populations in Southern California.

Significance of the Study

This study's contributions should be of interest to higher education leaders at local, district, and state levels who want to find effective strategies to better support community college counseling faculty as they play an essential role in the statewide goals as described in the *Vision for Success*. Given that national data showed that nearly 70% of community college students do not reach their graduation goals, student support services must be better understood and supported (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Counseling faculty play a critical role in students' development, retention, and completion of community college. This study specifically centered on counseling practitioners whose lived experiences deserve to be

documented, valued as expert consultation, and heavily considered in the implementation of strategies to address inequities in student outcomes in the California community college system.

Additionally, this study was designed with the understanding that the work done at California community colleges provides students with transformational opportunities. The demographic data provided in this dissertation captured the uniquely diverse backgrounds of the students at these campuses. Students from these diverse backgrounds come to these colleges seeking accessible pathways to higher education to enhance their personal and professional lives. Counseling faculty, while supporting all of these students, play an essential role in ensuring community colleges work toward their mission of creating opportunities for individuals to attain and utilize higher education for the betterment of society. As such, this study validated the unique role that these professionals played in the pursuit of social justice values while working toward additional support to enhance social justice outcomes in California's public education systems.

Definition of Key Terms

- **Community college/ junior college:** A public college that provides students with academic, vocational, and professional development coursework, typically at the lower-division level. Originally designed in collaboration with a senior partnering research university, early lower-division colleges were referred to as junior colleges, though “community college” has also been widely adopted across the United States. These terms will be used interchangeably in this study (Brint & Karabel, 1989).
- **Community college district:** California community colleges are organized into 72 districts, each with its own locally elected board of trustees and shared governance that

contributes to local campus leadership. Some districts are responsible for one school, while multi-campus districts can have two to nine campuses across the individual district (California State Auditor, 2017)

- **California Community College Chancellor's Office:** The chancellor's office is the central governing body that leads all 116 community colleges. The chancellor's office consists of three main offices charged with driving transformational change. These are the equitable student learning, experience and impact office; the institutional supports and success office; and the innovation, data, evidence and analytics office. The chancellor's office also provides human resource, legal, and marketing support to the community colleges in the state.
- **Community college system:** Describes the collection of 116 individual campuses overseen by the California Community College Chancellor's Office.

Organization of Dissertation

In Chapter 1, I introduced my study and its focus on the early onboarding and mentoring experiences of California community college counseling faculty using an ecological framework. The chapter described a brief background of the context of the California community college system's current student success goals to draw connections between the state's equity goals and the importance of counseling faculty in support of students. After listing the research questions, the chapter presented the purpose of the study, informed through the incorporation of a social-ecological framework. Finally, it provided a brief overview of the study's methodology and significance as a tool for achieving social justice outcomes in higher education. Chapter 2 provides a literature review to illuminate the need for empirical research related to community

college counseling faculty, their experiences, and the benefits of effective onboarding and mentoring practices. Chapter 3 describes the study's methodology and research design. Chapter 4 includes a thematic presentation of findings related to the research questions grounded in the study's qualitative data. The discussion section of this chapter connects the participants' experiences and the ecological framework to discuss effective onboarding and mentoring strategies. Finally, Chapter 5 provides recommendations for institutional leaders to assess their current support of counseling faculty using an ecological framework to determine appropriate strategies to intentionally increase support of counseling faculty in support of diverse student populations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review begins with the history and development of higher education in California before outlining the current vision for the future of the state's community colleges. The chapter then scrutinizes the persisting hurdles and inequalities in this diverse higher education system, along with policy initiatives introduced to tackle these issues. Amid these complexities, the chapter highlights counseling faculty's critical role and delves into their hiring, onboarding, and mentoring processes. Finally, the chapter introduces Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory as the study's theoretical framework, allowing for a more intricate understanding of the numerous factors that influence the work counseling faculty undertake in supporting diverse students.

History of Higher Education in the United States

While the intended outcomes of higher education have evolved, a constant among the various educational movements has been that universities serve as a symbol for the social, political, and moral values of their time. The earliest universities in the United States were strongly affiliated with and often led by religious institutions that sought to preserve classic subjects like philosophy and languages (Altbach et al., 2011). Over time, however, universities evolved into more independent organizations that had internal forms of administration. One of the most notable chapters for higher education development came in 1862 through the *Morrill Act* (*Morrill Act*, 1862; Nevins, 1962). This federal law created pathways for the government to reappoint land acquired by displacement of indigenous communities for the states to create land-grant colleges, which sought to provide higher education opportunities that balanced liberal arts

education with practical academic programs, including military tactics and both agricultural and mechanic arts (Lee, 1963). The result of this collaboration between both federal and state governments created an explosion of universities throughout the nation, which made way for industrial advancements while also beginning to slowly expand access to higher education to those outside of the financially elite white male status (Altbach et al., 2011). This meant that universities started to be heavily influenced by the communities in which they were developed, as seen in the academic programs they offered and the students they attracted.

During the late 1800s, after the expansion of universities throughout the nation, their leaders began to philosophically differentiate between the types of courses and learning experiences offered between the first 2 and last 2 years of higher education. In 1896, the president of the University of Missouri argued that the first 2 years of instruction were to be seen as an extension of the work completed in secondary school and, therefore, should be understood as separate from the work done at the junior and senior level years of university (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Other university presidents further advocated for these conceptualizations of higher education. University of Chicago President William Rainey Harper vocalized that the first 2 years of higher education were distinctly foundational and thus were separate from university-level research and instruction that is the basis of upper-division coursework. He argued that not until the end of sophomore-level work would students begin to utilize the research-oriented methods of academia that were distinct in upper-division education (Diener, 1985).

This trend of opinion regarding differentiating the first and second halves of higher education was fueled by the collective desire for top universities to rid their duty of being responsible for general education curriculum with an elitist desire to create universities focused

exclusively on university-level research and instruction. These university leaders sought to release their campuses of instruction at the freshman and sophomore levels by creating junior colleges focusing primarily on extending secondary education and providing general education opportunities. In 1900, William Rainey Harper was the first to create this distinction by partnering with high schools in Chicago to create coursework opportunities through secondary schools that collectively served as the first junior college, which offered separate courses from those available at the University of Chicago through its senior college (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

After Chicago's junior college was created, Harper pushed the faculty and campus trustees to establish a degree at the junior college level, later known as the associate degree, so that students would have an option of completing a goal that was completely independent of the university (Diener, 1985). Harper's motives were both praised and criticized. While many supported the associate degree as a motivator for completion of the first 2 years of college, Harper also spoke about how the associate degree could be used as a milestone that would be seen as an end goal for many students rather than a halfway point to the larger bachelor's degree (Karabel, 2012). This created criticism, for some saw the associate degree as a stopping point for the masses to achieve some level of education without the need to pursue a university education. Therefore, almost from its conception, the junior college model was tasked with the complex and often conflicting mission of being both a more accessible extension of secondary school for those who may not have considered higher education otherwise and a gatekeeper to higher-level university education.

While the inaugural junior colleges were rooted in complex ideologies, the philosophy of extending secondary education through accessible college-level coursework made the junior

college system one of the “most successful institutional innovations in 20th-century American higher education” (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 6). The American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC), created in 1920 and renamed the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) in 1992, advocated for 2-year colleges. The organization’s members spoke about these colleges’ benefits at the governmental and local levels to bring awareness of the potential of 2-year college models. In 1922, the AAJC identified a junior college as an “institution offering 2 years of instruction of strictly collegiate grade” (Bogue, 1950, p. xvii). Later, however, the AAJC hosted conversations about the purpose and direction of 2-year colleges as communities questioned whether they should remain focused on liberal arts-based programs or expand to include more practical areas of instruction that would be useful for those who wish to utilize education for training outside of traditional university settings.

By the 1940s, 2-year colleges throughout the nation began to expand their missions to include a dual focus on both university preparation and vocational certification education (Grubbs, 2020). The AAJC acknowledged the trajectory of the junior college mission, stating that junior colleges were “likely to develop a different type of curriculum suited to the larger and ever-changing civic, social, religious, and vocational needs of the entire community in which the college is located” (Bogue, 1950, p. xvii). The public saw value in the community college model as a means for providing education to those who may not immediately attend a university. Several states enacted policies to fund these colleges, and in 1965, direct federal funding under the Higher Education Act provided funding for their development and growth to make sure that 95% of the U.S. population had access to some form of higher education within a reasonable distance (Cohen, 1999). Through this expansion, community colleges became a more affordable

and accessible form of higher education for individuals from diverse backgrounds across the nation.

California Community Colleges

By the early 1900s, the most influential universities in California were Stanford, UC Berkeley, and the University of Southern California. State leaders saw value in promoting higher education, but access to universities across the state was limited both in geographic accessibility and enrollment space available at established universities. In reviewing the policies of junior colleges that had been started in other areas of the United States, California signed the 1907 *California Upward Extension Act*, which was the first state law in the history of the United States that authorized the establishment of junior colleges (*California Upward Extension Act*, 1907; Galizio, 2019). This law created pathways for high schools to offer postgraduate classes, which meant that the state could offer higher education opportunities in local communities. Geographical considerations were made to make sure that communities throughout the state had options for 2-year coursework. This allowed individuals to continue their education while working and living in their communities, making junior colleges popular and accessible options for those who could not relocate to attend a larger university (Cohen, 1999).

Early campuses often partnered with high schools in terms of faculty and administration, with budgets mostly being managed by high school principals and classes taught by high school teachers (Shires, 1994). Still, through partnerships between these campuses and the universities, students could utilize their 2-year coursework toward completion of a university degree. Within 10 years of the *California Upward Extension Act*, there were 16 junior colleges in the state. A statewide report (California Commission for the Study of Educational Problems, 1931, p.64;

California Upward Extension Act, 1907) documented these colleges' effectiveness in attracting and serving the diverse needs of the state's students by articulating four main categories of students who benefit from a community college education:

1. Students preparing to enter the junior class of standard 4-year universities.
2. Students with no occupation who benefit from 2 years of general education that they would not normally be able to afford.
3. Students who, upon immediate completion of their coursework at the community college, can secure employment in some semi-professional capacity (such as dental or medical assistant).
4. Students who would benefit from seeking a livelihood in some skilled or semi-skilled trade or occupation (such as mechanics, electricians, or horticulturists).

A Master Plan for Higher Education in California

Currently, California has 116 community colleges, making it the largest higher education system in the United States (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017). With over 1.8 million enrolled students per year, these campuses are open to all applicants and strive to be an accessible means of obtaining an education (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017). In addition to this one, the state also supports two other public college systems: the California State Universities and the Universities of California. The California Master Plan for Higher Education was drafted in 1960 to detail a clear vision of how the three systems would interact and support students throughout the state. First, the plan reaffirmed the community college's mission to support students who want to transfer to one of the other two systems. Community colleges would continue to serve students as an entry point into higher education in

collaboration with the state's research universities, the University of California system, and the comprehensive undergraduate campuses that make up the California State University system (Skaff, 2019).

The plan also designated the community college as a source of accessible vocational training and general and liberal arts courses, providing students with pathways to workforce development through academic, career certificate, and non-credit programs (Douglass, 2007). Finally, it recommended that individual campuses create local governance that could allow communities to tailor their colleges to the needs of local interests. This policy resulted in a diversity of programs tailored to the workforce development needs of the communities surrounding them. Presently, California community colleges remain gathering places for students with diverse academic, professional, and personal goals: non-credit programming, certificate and associate degree education, or transfer to a university to complete a bachelor's degree. Most recently, some community colleges began offering a limited number of bachelor's degrees (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.).

Community College Demographics

During the 2021–2022 academic year, the state's community college system reported statewide enrollment was near 1.8 million students (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017). As yearly data reports indicated (see Tables 1–5), the system served students from all ethnic backgrounds and all disability, socioeconomic, and citizenship statuses. While support programs provided specialized services to special populations (see Table 2), counseling faculty must be equipped to meet all students' needs, no matter the demographics of which they are a part. The complexity of the state's demographics reflected that of community college

faculty members' roles but is especially noteworthy when analyzing counseling faculty's success, given that their services often required one-on-one relationship-building between the faculty member and their students. This demographic data, therefore, has created an important context for the diverse student populations who look to community colleges as a means to achieve personal and social mobility.

Table 1

Annual 2021-2022 Student Demographics

	Student Count	Student Count (%)
Student Ethnicity	1,838,520	100.00
African American	98,992	5.38
American Indian/Alaskan Native	6,122	0.33
Asian	203,256	11.06
Filipino	46,576	2.53
Hispanic	863,340	46.96
Multi-Ethnicity	76,171	4.14
Pacific Islander	7,401	0.40
Unknown	90,359	4.91
White Non-Hispanic	446,303	24.28
Student Gender	1,838,520	100.00
Female	1,013,373	55.12
Male	792,734	43.12
Non-Binary	5,610	0.31
Unknown	26,803	1.46
Student Age Demographic	1,838,520	100.00
19 or Less	612,669	33.32
20 to 24	456,460	24.83
25 to 29	227,241	12.36
30 to 34	155,543	8.46
35 to 39	108,895	5.92
40 to 49	132,218	7.19
50 +	145,244	7.90
Unknown	250	0.01

Note. From the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Statistical Reports, 2022, <https://datamart.cccco.edu/Students/>, in the public domain.

Table 2*Headcount by Special Population Categories*

	Fall 2022	Spring 2022
ASEM - Achievement in a Science, Engineering, or Mathematics	723	835
Baccalaureate Degree Program Participant	472	420
CAA - Career Advancement Academy	1,149	1,484
CAFYES - Cooperating Agencies Foster Youth Educational Support	1,416	1,230
CalWORKs- California Work Opportunity & Responsibility to Kids	7,197	7,862
CARE - Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education	2,152	2,283
CCAP - College and Career Access Pathways	36,387	39,608
DSPS - Disabled Students Programs & Services	53,072	50,016
Economically Disadvantaged	141,799	134,322
EOPS - Extended Opportunity Programs & Services	54,130	50,474
First Generation	382,227	350,987
Formerly Incarcerated	3,738	3,595
Foster Youth	15,425	13,880
Having A Low Level of Literacy	29,137	24,702
Having Cultural Barriers To Employment	9,659	8,516
Homeless	5,272	5,831
Incarcerated	10,475	12,408
Long-term Unemployed	39,129	29,516
MCHS - Middle College High School Program	5,452	4,855
MESA - Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement	2,866	3,236
Military (Active Duty, Active Reserve, National Guard)	5,727	5,690
Puente	2,377	2,178
Seasonal Farm Worker	4,704	2,275
Special Admit	112,429	119,046
Umoja	4,473	4,178
Veteran	21,063	20,563
Work-based Learning Participant	38,095	65,443

Note. From the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Statistical Reports, 2022, <https://datamart.cccco.edu/Students/>, in the public domain.

Table 3*Student Citizenship Status*

	Fall 2021		Spring 2022	
	Headcount	Percentage (%)	Headcount	Percentage (%)
U.S. Citizen	1,176,824	86.84	1,097,437	86.05
Permanent Resident	74,874	5.53	70,978	5.57
Temporary Resident	6,127	0.45	6,914	0.54
Refugee/Asylee	7,107	0.52	7,347	0.58
Student Visa (F-1 or M-1 visa)	12,835	0.95	13,233	1.04
Other Status	39,434	2.91	37,993	2.98
Status Unknown/Uncollected	37,957	2.80	41,411	3.25

Note. From the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Statistical Reports, 2022, <https://datamart.cccco.edu/Students/>, in the public domain.

Table 4*Student Unit Load*

	Fall 2021		Spring 2022	
	Headcount	Percentage (%)	Headcount	Percentage (%)
0 Units	39	0.00	3	0.00
0.1–2.9	64,399	4.75	70,061	5.49
3.0–5.9	401,599	29.63	396,442	31.09
6.0–8.9	239,730	17.69	228,526	17.92
9.0–11.9	186,320	13.75	169,640	13.30
12.0–14.9	234,530	17.31	189,807	14.88
15 +	120,790	8.91	105,360	8.26
Non-Credit	107,751	7.95	115,473	9.05

Note. From the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Statistical Reports, 2022, <https://datamart.cccco.edu/Students/>, in the public domain.

Table 5

Financial Aid and Socioeconomic Status

Student Financial Status	Percent of Population (%)
Pell Grant Eligible	20
Cal Grant Eligible	5
California Promise Grant Eligible	45

	Percentage of Students Surveyed (%)
Housing Insecure	60
Food Insecure	50

Note. From the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Statistical Reports, 2022, <https://datamart.cccco.edu/Students/>, in the public domain.

Inequities and Challenges

While the immense diversity of students that community colleges serve across California is noteworthy, any discussion about the system while evaluating student success data requires acknowledgment of inequities and challenges. In looking at data related to course completion, persistence from semester to semester, and transfer rates of students from community colleges to bachelor’s degree-granting colleges and universities, equity gaps are apparent, especially among Hispanic, African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander or Hawaiian Native students.

The data presented in Tables 6, 7, and 8 were collected yearly and posted through colleges’ student success metrics online tool. While the data provided some comparison of success rates over time, once disaggregated by sub-groups, the metrics leading up to the cohort beginning college in 2020 primarily captured data for students who enrolled in at least two courses and attempted both math and English within 3 years (Zinshteyn, 2022). This data excluded thousands of students who did not meet these criteria; therefore, the state-provided completion information is inflated to show much higher data than is the reality (Zinshteyn,

2022). Given that this was the data available to the state at the time of this study, it was included here as a reference, but a new metric captured any attempted coursework for students who began during or after Fall 2020. This new metric, however, did not produce data until the first cohort has been enrolled in at least 3 academic years.

Outside data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2022) showed a full picture of non-inflated data. When comparing community college retention to that of public universities, community college rates were at 61%, while university retention rates were at 82%. Graduation rates also vary significantly, with 63% of university students graduating within 150% of the typical time for their degree, while only 29% of community college students do so (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). This national data contextualized the inflated figures provided by the state until the new, more accurate metrics go into effect. Accurate data representation showed a much more dire situation in the pursuit of California’s equity goals.

Table 6

Systemwide Course Completion Rate (2020–2021)

Population	Completion Rate (%)	Equity Gap (%)
Group Average	75	--
American Indian/Alaska Native	69	-6
Asian	85	+10
Black or African American	64	-21
Filipino	81	-4
Hispanic	71	-10
Pacific Islander or Hawaiian Native	69	-12
White	80	+11
Multiple Ethnicities Reported	75	+6
Two or More Races	74	-1
Unknown/Non-Respondent	77	+2

Note. From the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Statistical Reports, 2022, <https://datamart.cccco.edu/Students/>, in the public domain.

Table 7*Fall to Spring Persistence (2020–2021)*

Population	Persistence Rate (%)	Equity Gap (%)
Group Average	69	--
American Indian/Alaska Native	64	-5
Asian	74	+5
Black or African American	64	-5
Filipino	73	+4
Hispanic	68	-1
Pacific Islander or Hawaiian Native	66	-3
White	70	+1
Multiple Ethnicities Reported	87	+18
Two or More Races	70	+1
Unknown/Non-Respondent	69	+5

Note. From the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Statistical Reports, 2022, <https://datamart.cccco.edu/Students/>, in the public domain.

Table 8*Students Who Transferred to a 4-Year Institution (2019–2020)*

Population	Persistence Rate (%)	Equity Gap (%)
Group Average	25	--
American Indian/Alaska Native	18	-7
Asian	32	+7
Black or African American	20	-5
Filipino	32	+7
Hispanic	23	-2
Pacific Islander or Hawaiian Native	21	-4
White	26	+1
Multiple Ethnicities Reported	33	+8
Two or More Races	30	+5
Unknown/Non-Respondent	14	-1

Note. From the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Statistical Reports, 2022, <https://datamart.cccco.edu/Students/>, in the public domain.

California's Vision for Success Plan

In 2017, a group of community college stakeholders, under the directive of the California Community College Chancellor's Office, created a report titled the *Vision for Success* to provide a unified, measurable goal for the 116 California community colleges to address barriers and inequities in their system over a 5-year timeline (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017). The plan defined six collective goals, which all sought to intentionally reduce equity gaps while also promoting timely and efficient completion rates (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017). First, the plan called for a 20% increase in completion rates for associate degrees, credentials, and certificates and a 35% increase in rates of transfer to the University of California or California State University campuses. The plan also called for increasing Career Technical Education outcomes from 60% of those who are employed in a field related to their completed certificate after graduation to 69%. In addition, the plan encouraged lowering from 87 to 79 the average number units that students who eventually earn an associate degree accumulated. Finally, the plan created a short-term and long-term goal of closing equity gaps, first by 40% in 5 years and 100% by 10 years, with particular emphasis on both statewide and regional achievement gaps (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017).

The plan summarized the key role that community colleges play in meeting the needs of diverse student populations and reaffirmed their role in advancing higher education and workforce development (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017). Since 2017, the *Vision for Success* continues to guide individual campuses as they work toward the statewide goals. While the original *Vision for Success* report provided data-informed goals for the 116 campuses, the report did not include specific action items that individual campuses needed to

enact. Instead, the report served as a call to action that encouraged campus leaders to consider academics and support services from the student perspective. The California Community College Chancellor's Office detailed a commitment to helping campuses by providing timely data and facilitating opportunities for campuses to learn from one another to develop and improve high-impact practices to help institutions begin to do their part to close systemwide gaps (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017).

Despite most of the *Vision for Success* goals being linked to student retention, course success, and transfer and career readiness, the report did not include specific recommendations for implementation, nor did it provide guidance on how campuses were to work toward achieving the ambitious goals (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017). Over time, however, as individual campuses began working toward the goals locally, themes emerged across the state of effective practices that would help institutions make progress. In 2021, The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, a faculty-facilitated non-profit that collects the concerns and advocacy needs of individual districts' academic senates, published a resolution that specifically acknowledged the key role that counseling faculty play in working toward the *Vision for Success* goals. The resolution acknowledged that they play critical roles in providing services that help students identify their educational pathways and get support from semester to semester through counseling services and programs that promote completion and transfer.

The resolution also brought to attention the fact that support services often receive budget cuts during economic recessions (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2021). The resolution made two recommendations to all faculty senates across the state. First, the

Academic Senate for California Community Colleges committed to advocating to the chancellor's office for more funding to support the hiring of full-time counseling faculty to help meet counselor-student ratio demands. Second, the resolution resolved "that the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges advocate and provide support for local academic senates to sustain and increase faculty counseling positions to meet student needs" (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2021, para 6.). This resolution, created after nearly 4 years of observed trends after the *Vision for Success* was released, showed that both instructional and non-instructional faculty across the state understood that counseling faculty play a necessary role in meeting students' needs and helping campuses work toward closing equity gaps.

Community College Counseling Faculty

The use of counseling faculty as a primary means to provide support services to students is distinct to California community colleges. These faculty members hold specific degrees that allow them to do high-level interpersonal work with students, and their designation as faculty also places them in a unique position in the larger institution as they interact with individual students, academic faculty and administrators, and the larger community college community. This section provides context to counseling faculty and the work they do while also highlighting the lack of research that exists related to supporting them and their development.

Unique Qualifications of Counseling Faculty

In 1990, after *California Assembly Bill 1725* (A.B.1725, 1988) had been enacted, the board of governors that oversaw the California community college system developed a comprehensive list of minimum qualifications for faculty, managers, and administrators that had been outlined in the Education Code of the California Title 5 (5 C.C.R. § 53410). Included in

this list were the minimum academic requirements for counseling faculty: a “master’s in counseling, rehabilitation counseling, clinical psychology, counseling psychology, guidance counseling, educational counseling, social work, career development, marriage and family therapy or marriage, family and child counseling” (California Community Colleges, Chancellor’s Office, 2014). Additionally, those who worked with special populations such as Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) or Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS) must meet additional stipulations regarding minimum unit requirements in areas related to their special population. The minimum qualifications included advanced training in mental health and human development. Intentionally including professionals from diverse academic training backgrounds, such as social work or counseling psychology, enabled counseling departments to hire in ways that allow for various interpersonal and social-emotional frameworks to be utilized to address the diverse needs of student populations that utilize community college education (Hodges, 2021). The minimum qualifications set up in 1990 have remained the same for counseling faculty.

Designation as Faculty

Academic counselors in the California community college system are hired as faculty members at the college rather than as classified staff. According to Title 5, regulation 53402, faculty are “those employees of a district who are employed in academic positions that are not designated as supervisory or management” (5 C.C.R. § 53402, para. 3). This faculty designation includes instructors, counselors, librarians, and select disabled student programs and health services professionals. While counseling faculty also teach coursework in areas related to counseling and human development, they are often categorized as non-instructional faculty

because their primary contractual role is to facilitate counseling services outside of the classroom.

In 1988, *Assembly Bill 1725* (A.B.1725, 1988) detailed the importance of non-instructional faculty, stating that local community colleges should ensure that faculty include “counselors, librarians, and other instructional and student service faculty who can foster college effectiveness and who are experts in the subject matter of their specialty” (Faculty Association of California Community Colleges, n.d., p. 13). This law also ensured all faculty members do not have to decide between bargaining agreements and the work required to advance the success of local campuses. As a result, full-time counseling faculty, like their full-time instructional colleagues, have been typically hired as tenure-track faculty. As faculty, counselors continue to participate in the shared governance of their colleges, which requires that all faculty help guide conversations related to curriculum and instruction, degree and certificate requirements, educational program development, professional development for all faculty, and more.

The use of counselors as non-instructional faculty has been unique to California. Other higher education counseling and advising models in the United States have utilized non-faculty academic advisors or instructional faculty advising models that have students meet with instructors in their discipline for course and career advisement. While research existed about various forms of advising models across colleges and universities in the United States, there was a gap in research that understood the unique positionality and roles that counseling faculty have in the California community college system.

To contextualize the onboarding experience for California community college faculty, it is important to note that the state has used a two-tiered system that includes both adjunct and

full-time faculty. Adjunct faculty, regardless of discipline, worked in non-tenured, part-time roles but still made up the majority of faculty, as only 30% of faculty were in full-time tenured roles (Kezar et al., 2016). Typically, newly hired faculty were hired as part-time adjunct faculty. Individuals could, and often did, work at multiple community colleges to piece together the equivalent of a full-time schedule (Zitko & Schultz, 2020). After working as an adjunct faculty, individuals could build their experience and become competitive applicants when full-time tenure-track positions became available. While not all adjunct faculty share the goal of transitioning to a full-time position, this remains the most common path for new faculty members to transition from graduate student to adjunct faculty to full-time tenure-track faculty. This trajectory has been similar for all community college faculty positions, including instructional and non-instructional positions.

Services Counseling Faculty Offer

In 2008, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges drafted a policy paper built from an original publication in 1995 that detailed some of the roles and essential functions that counseling faculty and counseling programs play. This has been one of the only comprehensive documents available throughout the state that details these professional's roles and responsibilities. The document highlighted eight main functions of counseling faculty (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2008, p. 3).

1. Academic counseling, in which the student is assisted in assessing, planning, and implementing his or her immediate and long-range academic goals.
2. Career counseling, in which the student is assisted in assessing his or her aptitudes, abilities, and interests, and advised concerning current and future employment trends.

3. Personal counseling, in which the student is assisted with personal, family, or other social concerns when that assistance is related to the student's education.
4. Crisis intervention, either directly or through cooperative arrangements with other resources on campus or in the community.
5. Conducting outreach, to students and the community to encourage them to avail themselves of services, focused on maximizing all students' potential to benefit from the academic experience.
6. Participating in the college governance process and advocating to make the environment as beneficial to the intellectual, emotional, and physical development of students as possible.
7. Researching and reviewing counseling programs and services with the goal of improving their effectiveness.
8. Training and professional development for counseling staff, interns, and others in the college community.

In addition to the eight main functions, the policy report highlighted the profession's key competencies. It emphasized that "an overarching principle that underlies all counseling activities is an appreciation of and respect for the diversity of the student population" (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2008, p. 3). It stated that counseling faculty are required to have developed knowledge about how oppression and discrimination impact their counseling relationship with students. The policy paper recommended that counselors acquire specific knowledge that applies to the student populations with whom they work and have a baseline understanding of how "race, culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical

or mental disability, religion, marital status, socioeconomic status and the like affect personality formation, career choices, learning styles, help-seeking behavior, and the appropriateness of counseling approaches” (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2008, p. 4).

While some specialized programs for specific demographics of students may allow for counselors to have specialized practices, community college counselors must be able to meet all students’ needs. Additionally, as noted in the eight main functions, responsibilities require both adjunct and full-time counselors to have various levels of impact at the college, as their work include one-on-one services to students, larger group support service efforts, and campuswide programming and development. As a result, they work within systems to provide students with layered support.

Hiring and Onboarding of Community College Faculty

Given that the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges called for statewide commitment in hiring and supporting new full-time counseling faculty in pursuit of the *Vision for Success* goals, the context of hiring, onboarding, and mentoring of new counseling professionals may play a critical role in supporting the needs of diverse student populations. Hiring at individual campuses is impacted by statewide influence. Job descriptions are designed utilizing the minimum qualifications discipline list set by the state (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2019). Once finalized, campuses are encouraged to promote the position to the public in multiple ways to maximize diversity in the hiring pool (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2019).

For prospective faculty members, the application and interview process include several standardized milestones throughout each of the community college districts. First, applicants

must submit an application that includes educational history and work experience. This step ensures hiring committees can verify that applicants meet the minimum state standards for the discipline (Parker & Richards, 2020). Top qualified applicants are then invited to a first-level interview that typically includes a manager and several faculty members from the academic discipline that is hiring. Interviewees typically answer predetermined questions that the hiring committee created in consultation with human resources. For both part-time and full-time positions, faculty may answer questions related to their professional experience and educational philosophies and will likely provide a demonstration of their teaching or counseling approach (Parker & Richards, 2020). While part-time positions usually require one interview, full-time positions can require two or three. Full-time positions may require additional interview committee members as defined by district bargaining units. This can include students, faculty outside the discipline, administrators, and the president or superintendent of the district (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2019).

Once hired, faculty go through various forms of onboarding that can range from technical support, such as getting access to campus systems, to discipline-specific onboarding, including department approaches to curriculum and campus services. Tierney and Rhoads (1993) described this interpersonal exchange, which they call faculty socialization, as the process in which various cultural, political, and academic norms shape new faculty and their self-perceptions of their roles. They described this onboarding process as having two stages. The first is the anticipatory socialization stage, in which prospective faculty are still working toward their degrees while in undergraduate and graduate-level programs. During this time, students are exposed to faculty in their disciplines that begin to shape future faculty members' perceptions of the field. Then, once

students graduate and transition into the early stages of their careers, they begin the next form of onboarding through organizational socialization. In this stage, faculty are tasked with an ongoing process of learning and relearning their roles as their work in academia continues to evolve as their discipline and the students they work with change over time. Due to the evolutionary nature of educational spaces, they argued that organizational socialization is an ongoing process, even for those well into their tenured faculty career. Tierney and Rhoads (1993) observed that onboarding, through a lens of faculty socialization, must acknowledge the layers of adaptation needed by new faculty as they navigate new politics, institutional cultures, relationships with new colleagues, and norms of their profession.

Outside of education, Bauer (2010) wrote that onboarding consists of four distinct levels, or the four Cs: compliance, clarification, culture, and connection. The initial stage of an onboarding program, compliance, involved teaching new hires basic information to help them understand the organization's expectations. Administrators explain policies, rules, and regulations, guiding employees on how to operate within these boundaries. The following stage, clarification, focused on defining employees' roles, job descriptions, and performance assessment criteria. Employers frequently include clarification in onboarding to help employees succeed in their new positions. The third stage, culture, introduced employees to the organization's formal and informal norms and how their roles fit within this context. It also instructed them on navigating the organization without disrupting established norms, which can be a challenging and time-consuming concept to grasp. The final stage, connection, established a network of colleagues and resources to support new employees' success. This may involve

informal or formal mentoring, work groups, or idea-sharing sessions, fostering a sense of community and support.

Mentoring of Community College Faculty

In its 2019 publication, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges identified that mentorship is one of the most vital ways to support and retain new faculty members. Though not officially included in job descriptions of full-time faculty, the publication encouraged faculty to be leading experts in supporting and mentoring other faculty in their discipline. To serve their students, faculty of all disciplines must navigate systems, procedures, and policies that can vary from campus to campus. As they learn these tools and resources, faculty support comes through direct and ongoing mentorship (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2019). Formal faculty mentor programs could include regular meetings that combine discussions of pedagogical skills, opportunities to discuss concerns and obstacles on the campus, and presentations from various resources and support systems on campus (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2019; Lyons, 1996).

Additionally, informal mentoring has been done between individuals who connect and form a relationship in which one can learn from the other (Haynes-Burton, 2007). Data has supported that both formal and informal mentorship can be effective, though formal mentorship opportunities have a higher assurance rate that relationships are forming (Haynes-Burton, 2007). Positive effects of mentorship programs that include adjunct faculty have resulted in new hires feeling a stronger connection to the campus, thus reducing their turnover while increasing their effectiveness in serving students in their discipline (Horton, 2013). It is noteworthy that mentorship can be imperative in supporting faculty from minority backgrounds, as faculty learn

from one another how to build community and connection among themselves and their students in academic spaces that are overwhelmingly centered on Whiteness (Haynes-Burton, 2007). Supported faculty members are more likely to be able to support students, which means an institution's investment in mentoring opportunities is directly linked to investment in student outcomes.

Gaps in Existing Research

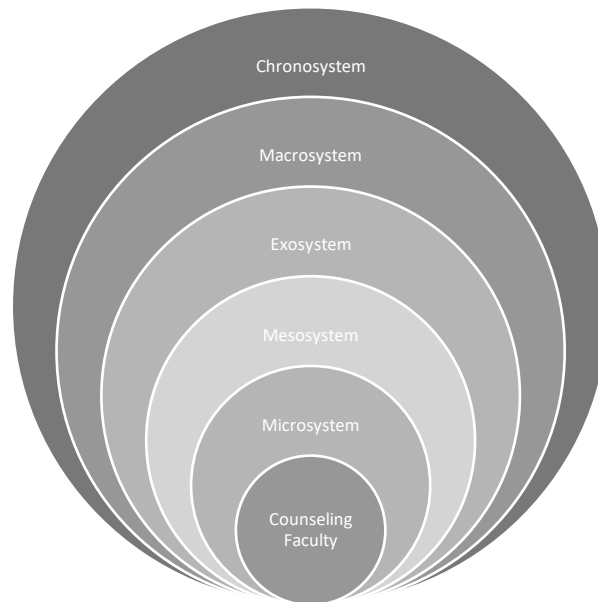
Given that California community colleges have made up the largest system of education in the United States, there have been large research gaps related to how counseling faculty are utilized to help students achieve their personal and professional goals. California has been unique in requiring these faculty members to have master's level degrees in therapeutic-based disciplines. These professionals have served students coming from immensely diverse backgrounds and have been tasked with providing provide a range of services, including academic, career, personal, and crisis counseling, but there has been little research that details how they prepare for the adaptability required to succeed in their roles. Even though all 116 campuses have used the same model, there has been virtually no peer-reviewed research on best practices for counseling faculty to be onboarded, mentored, and utilized in support of diverse students. Counseling services have required equity-focused practices to achieve social justice outcomes. Data must continue to be collected to investigate practices for supporting these faculty members, particularly with the lens of the multiple layers of support that counselors provide to students through an ecological framework. This data may be fundamental in maximizing the community college system's ability to support these faculty members while working toward meeting the needs of its 1.8 million students.

Theoretical Framework

California community college counseling faculty have played a unique role in the state's mission of using public education to support the needs of diverse student populations. Due to the complexity of their interactions with students, their role as non-instructional faculty, and their connection to both district and statewide success goals, their role must be viewed in the context of the various levels of work they do in supporting the diverse community college students. Bronfenbrenner (1979) conceptualized ecological systems theory with the foundational belief that human development cannot be considered independent of context. In this way, individual development has been viewed in the context of the various social, political, and economic systems that surround people (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). California community colleges are complex systems, nested within larger community systems and made up of a myriad of subsystems. Therefore, using an ecological perspective, this study sought to gain a clear understanding of the various contexts in which counselors do their work, as well as the onboarding and mentoring support they need to adequately serve diverse student populations. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) original organization of the ecological theory centers on a child's individual development. This study, however, places counseling faculty at the center of the model.

Figure 2

Adaptation of Ecological Framework That Centers Counseling Faculty



Note. Adapted from *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* by U. Bronfenbrenner, 1979. Harvard University Press; copyright 1979 by Harvard University Press.

The microsystem includes the interactions with which individuals are in direct contact in their immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For counseling faculty, this includes daily exchanges with students, counseling peers, instructional faculty, the dean of counseling, and even family members outside of the workplace. Influence on development from those in the microsystem is direct. This level includes a series of repetitive activities, roles, and relationships by counseling faculty that directly interact with their immediate environment. The quality of these relationships can impact the onboarding and mentoring of counseling faculty.

The mesosystem includes interactions between two or more microsystems in the work life of counseling faculty, with special attention on the connections and relationships and how they hinder or enhance student success (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, even if they are

not experiencing these interactions directly, a counselor's onboarding may be impacted by the ways that the dean of counseling and experienced counselors in the department interact with one another to set up training for new counseling faculty. In this way, the influence on development from the mesosystem is less direct but still present.

The exosystem incorporates the larger systems surrounding the individual that have an impact on the individual's experience (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The exosystem describes an environment or level of influence that the community college counselor is not directly a part of, but which influences their experiences. Examples of influence at the exosystem level include statewide policies and funding that impact higher education, healthcare and mental health services, school boards, and local politics. These influences shape the work of counseling faculty as they work with students at a local level.

The macrosystem includes cultural elements such as socioeconomic status, wealth, poverty, and ethnicity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This system is the overarching arrangement of micro-, meso-, and exosystems of a particular environment in society, with particular regard to an individual's belief systems, resources, opportunity structures, and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in such overarching systems. One of the characteristics of the macrosystem is that the individual does not exist at this level or environment, but the environment impacts development by influencing the world in which they exist. An example of this is when a college accepts government funding, which often results in "strings attached" interactions in the form of accountability measures that align with governmental goals and priorities. These priorities can impact the types of programs offered, funding restrictions, and the resulting initiatives that counseling faculty are asked to be a part of. These initiatives may affect

the onboarding and mentoring of faculty, as training may be required for practitioners to properly work within requirements created at the macrosystem level.

The chronosystem encompasses life changes or historical events that can have an impact on an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This includes transition moments such as having children, getting a divorce, having to change careers, and surviving traumatic life events. It can also describe larger events that have a more widespread impact on a community. Examples of this for counselors can include the COVID-19 pandemic, which shifted how people gather and interact, as well as the higher education landscape for facilitating traditional education experiences in classrooms on college campuses.

Summary

Throughout their history in the United States, community colleges have served as a bridge for members of society to access higher education to prepare for academic, personal, and professional development. Presently, California enrolls the most community college students in the United States, many of whom come from diverse, often minoritized populations (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017). Given their mission of helping all students reach their educational goals, the state's community college system developed widespread equity goals to guide campuses in closing equity gaps while promoting student success (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017). Counseling faculty play a significant role in the support of all students, as they provide academic, personal, and career counseling services. As a result, they are directly involved in students' onboarding, retention, and persistence. Given their role in promoting the state's equity goals, counselors and their experiences as student services professionals need to be understood for campus leaders to fully operationalize support systems

for marginalized students. Counseling faculty's roles are unique and require specific onboarding and thorough and ongoing mentoring for them to adequately serve the diverse students the community college system serves. Since research centering these professionals and their work is sparse, utilizing existing developmental theories such as Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory can provide a necessary framework for better understanding what supports are needed while assessing counselors' experiences and needs, particularly in the early years of their career.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

As noted in Chapter 2, there has been little empirical data on the best practices for supporting California community college counseling faculty as they engage with diverse student populations. The state's community college system has served 1.8 million students, making it the largest system of higher education in the nation. One hundred sixteen individual campuses serve populations that are diverse in terms of race, gender, socioeconomic status, academic preparation, disability status, and more. Counseling faculty have played a critical role in supporting students through academic, personal, career, and crisis counseling that is attentive to the intersectionality of each student's identities. They serve students both interpersonally and by helping students navigate complicated policies and systems of higher education. Despite their complex roles and responsibilities, there has been a lack of baseline data related to the complexity of the many roles community college faculty play while supporting students. As a result, there also has been a lack of information on the ways institutions can actively support counseling faculty as they are onboarded and mentored early on in their careers.

This study focused on the experiences of counseling faculty who narrate their perspectives on how effective onboarding and mentoring directly impacted their ability to support diverse students. Their personal narratives provided the opportunity to define the context and meaning of the work they do in the ecological system of California community colleges. Participants had at least 5 years in community college counseling. Thus, this study captured perspectives built on several years of engagement in the field and recent memories of the onboarding and early mentoring that helped shape the interviewees' careers.

Research Questions

One overarching question and two sub-questions guide this qualitative study:

1. How do the onboarding and mentoring of community college counseling faculty reflect an institution's support of diverse student populations?
 - a. What policies and practices exist, from the counseling faculty perspective, that effectively support the onboarding and mentoring of counseling faculty?
 - b. How can an ecological framework assist in identifying recommendations on what supports for counseling faculty are necessary for institutions to be successful in their mission to support diverse students?

Narrative Inquiry as a Qualitative Approach

According to Denzin (2008), qualitative research involves various empirical materials: case study, personal experience, introspection, life stories, interviews, artifacts, cultural texts, and production observation, historical interactional and visual tests. Invariably, qualitative research consists of interpretive, material practices that make the word visible. This study was situated in the field of narrative research and influenced by key scholars such as Bruner (2005), Connelly and Clandinin (1990), and Miles and Huberman (1994). As Bruner (2005) posited, the value of narratives is that written or spoken language, as reported by a participant, is sometimes the only way to come to know or understand that individual's experience. Narrative research relies on participant discourse, which can come in different forms (journals, oral statements, interviews, etc.) and is transcribed into text for analysis. In narrative research, the stories people tell about their experiences become the researcher's data.

Polkinghorne (1988) posited that narrative inquiry has two research possibilities: descriptive and explanatory. Descriptive narrative research intends to use the discourse the participants construct to understand the meaning they make of an event. The purpose of explanatory narrative research is to explain, through narration, why something happened. The questions central to this study focus on developing a deep understanding of a particular context, and the research questions align with the goals of descriptive narrative research. As a qualitative methodology, narrative inquiry uses stories as data, where the participants contribute to the larger picture of the “way humans experience the world” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004, p. 2) and share their reality. In essence, narrative inquiry becomes an approach to studying human lives in which experiences are a source of essential knowledge and understanding. Thus, the experience becomes the starting point. Narrative data provides a holistic and respectful representation of a person’s life in context and thus connects to the theoretical framework utilized in this exploratory study. Counseling faculty exist in a holistic ecological system continually shaped by their micro-, meso-, and exosystems. Only through personalized narratives that center their experiences can foundational research be utilized to understand how institutions can best support counselors working with diverse student populations.

The Appropriateness of Narrative Research

Determining the appropriate methods for a study is directly linked to the questions being asked. In this case, the research questions directly linked human experience and how the individuals reporting understood, organized, and interpreted that experience. Narrative research has been promoted as a paradigm particularly useful for documenting and understanding a particular phenomenon, context, or experience. California community colleges are complex

systems, nested within larger community systems and made up of a myriad of subsystems. By using an ecological perspective, this study documented counselor experiences to gain a clear understanding of the various contexts in which counseling faculty do their work, as well as the support they need to adequately serve diverse student populations. Narrative data is contextual (Chase, 2013). The story of each participant within a narrative study is both supported and hindered by the socio-historical and socio-cultural contexts in which it originally occurred and in which it is told. In the narrative, a participant constructs identities based on settings, culture, location, and a host of other factors. As those factors change, identities change. As participants retell their stories, the context and contexts of those experiences shape the meaning-making. Using this lens, the researcher is assisted in accounting for similarities and differences across multiple interviews of one participant and interviews of multiple participants.

Narrative inquiry examines what is referred to as the four directions: “inward and outward, backward and forward” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004, p. 50). The researcher asks questions to encourage participants to share their personal stories from their past and present experiences. Questions that assist participants in revealing their inner hopes, feelings, and future dreams are encouraged so connections can be made between the past, the present, and the future. The researcher gathers detailed descriptions of the context of events and the social interactions of these experiences. Then, the events can be situated in a place or setting that is interwoven and connected with the storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004).

When using narrative inquiry, the three elements of sociality, temporality, and place must all be explored simultaneously (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). Although all experiences are unique to each individual, they are shaped by the social, cultural, and institutional narratives in

which they are embedded. Since there has been little research on community college counseling faculty despite their essential role across California, exploratory research aided in documenting the lived experiences and perspectives of these professionals who are on the front lines supporting students. Narrative inquiry provided the space to center these professionals' perspectives to extract themes that lead to best practices that community college leaders can adopt. In reviewing student success data and the systemwide *Vision for Success* goals, counseling faculty play a unique role in assisting students along their path toward completion (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017). This study examined counselor perspectives to illuminate best practices that can be applied to create environments in which diverse college students can thrive.

Research Design

The following section provides a detailed overview of the research design, which includes a description of the setting of the research, the participants, the data collection and analysis plan, my positionality as the researcher, and a brief overview of the study's limitations and delimitations.

Research Setting

To capture a wide range of perspectives, I was selective in gathering participants from various community colleges in Southern California. The study collected multiple perspectives of five full-time community college counseling faculty with at least 5 years of experience. To maximize the diversity of participants' experiences, each interviewee was a full-time tenure or tenure-track faculty member at a different community college district in Southern California.

Participants

I selected participants through purposive sampling, a technique that enables the researcher to choose individuals and sites that “purposefully inform an understanding of the research question and central phenomenon of the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Through purposive sampling, participants are not randomly assigned or selected but chosen intentionally to maximize the depth of understanding surrounding the research questions. Although this sampling method may limit the generalizability of findings to the larger population, it is particularly useful for exploring under-researched topics, such as community college counseling experiences.

During participant recruitment, I, as the researcher, initially reached out to my network of counseling faculty members who possessed at least 5 years of experience working with diverse students in community colleges. My pre-existing connection and rapport with potential participants did not undermine the study’s integrity, as I implemented appropriate measures to guarantee that all participants could express their views candidly and without any bias toward me. These measures included providing participants with a detailed overview of the study, including the interview questions, at the time of recruitment so that all participants understood the nature of the topics being researched. At the start of recruitment, I sent a recruitment email to all prospective participants that included the scope of the study, information about the participant screening criteria, and an outline of the research project and methodology. To adhere to the principles of voluntary participation, I notified all potential participants that their involvement was not obligatory and that they could opt out at any time. Before officially starting the research, informed consent forms were distributed to and signed by all participants to ensure that they

comprehended the study's objectives and fully understood and communicated their consent to be a part of the study.

Data Collection

This exploratory study, focusing on community college counselor experiences related to effective onboarding and mentoring strategies that support diverse student success, employed two sequential stages of data collection. In the first stage, participants completed a questionnaire containing essential demographic information to provide context for their personal and professional experiences. Examples of questions included educational background, counseling expertise in community colleges, and primary responsibilities at work. Additionally, I asked participants to journal a response reflecting on their experiences when they were newly hired. These written narratives informed subsequent interview dialogues with the participants. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) wrote, "The sense of the whole is built from a rich data source with a focus on the concrete particularities of life that create powerful narrative tellings" (p. 5). As such, participants were allowed to submit any pertinent documentation or artifacts that they found valuable during their onboarding and mentoring experiences, such as training materials, professional development information, resources developed with mentors, and positive feedback from students or colleagues. These submissions served as artifacts during data collection, enabling participants to share their experiences in personally meaningful ways (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

The second data collection phase consisted of semi-structured interviews with each participant. Semi-structured interviews use predetermined open-ended questions to direct the conversation between the interviewer and the participant. This method retains structure while

permitting flexibility to delve deeper into responses or seek clarification. It is valuable for obtaining rich, detailed information and understanding complex experiences, attitudes, or beliefs. This approach enabled participants to express their views in their own words, capturing nuanced and genuine data. As the researcher, I invited each participant to participate in 1-hour interviews that took place over Zoom (www.zoom.us). The interview questions prompted the counseling faculty participants to discuss onboarding and mentoring and their interpretations of these experiences. The interviews brought up factors that contributed to successful onboarding and mentoring processes, as well as the challenges and opportunities they encountered in various contexts. Finally, the interviews allowed participants to create meaning on the ways that onboarding and mentoring experiences shaped their professional development, competencies, and strategies for supporting diverse student populations. I intentionally designed the interview questions to place the participants at the center of an ecological system, allowing them to share stories in the context of the micro-, meso-, and exosystem in and around the community college system. Given narrative inquiry's focus on inward and outward, backward and forward, I provided participants with an interview protocol beforehand to offer time for reflection before participating (see Appendix). Sample interview questions were:

1. What experiences prepared you for your first job as a counseling faculty member, and how do those experiences contribute to your work with community college students?
2. Early in your career, what opportunities did you have access to within your place(s) of work that helped you gain the skills you needed to work effectively with students?
3. In addition to supporting your students during one-on-one counseling services, what types of interactions with other offices on campus or resources from outside of your

- campus were required to effectively perform your role as a counseling faculty member?
4. Were there any professional development opportunities outside your place of work that you remember utilizing to help you transition into your role as a counselor as it relates to working with offices outside of the counseling department?
 5. When reflecting on the roles and responsibilities of counseling faculty, are there areas that are harder to prioritize?
 6. In what ways do you think community colleges demonstrate their understanding of student needs based on their support of counseling faculty and their services?

All interview data were recorded using Zoom with the permission of each interviewee.

During the interview, I only relied on brief notetaking to allow me to focus on engaging with the participants to make sure they felt heard and valued in the presentation of their narratives.

Establishing a trusting relationship with participants is an essential component when retelling stories that are truly representative of the participants' experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). As a result, I worked to create an environment in which participants felt free to communicate stories that included the struggles, complexities, and ambiguities involved in their day-to-day experiences. After the interviews were completed, I transcribed using a secure online software called HappyScribe (www.happyscribe.com), which provided an initial transcript. I cleaned up and edited the transcripts to ensure there were no transcription errors. Non-narrative lines, such as casual conversation, were deleted, participants were assigned fictitious names, and any participant identifiers (e.g., names, locations) were replaced or removed. The video, audio,

and transcribed notes were securely stored in a password-encrypted digital file and will be deleted 1 year after the study is completed.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data, such as interviews, focus group transcripts, or open-ended survey responses, to identify common themes or patterns in the data. This approach is commonly used in the social sciences, and it involves carefully reading and coding the data to identify and categorize themes or ideas. Thematic analysis is a flexible and adaptable approach to data analysis, and it can be useful for uncovering insights and patterns in a wide range of qualitative data. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis process guided this study's thematic analysis. This process allowed me, as the researcher, to describe emergent themes from participants' stories, uncover nuances about their experiences, note similarities and differences across participants, and provide an interpretation in light of the literature and this study's conceptual framework. Below is a description of how I conducted the thematic analysis.

1. **Familiarization with the data:** I immersed myself in the data by reviewing the responses to the questionnaire and reading and re-reading the transcripts to develop a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences.
2. **Coding:** I used both inductive and deductive coding in the analysis of interview and document data. Inductive coding involves starting with the data itself and allowing the themes and patterns to emerge from the data. I elected to complete the data analysis manually. I first conducted an initial review of the transcripts to familiarize myself with the content. I then reread the transcripts carefully, highlighting prominent

ideas and any recurring words or messages. I developed a corresponding code, a shorthand designation to easily identify the recurring words/ideas for that passage, and placed it in the margin. As these patterns emerged, I created an initial codebook. This step was exploratory and grounded in the data, allowing unexpected insights to surface. I then applied deductive coding, using the existing ecological framework as a lens to re-evaluate the data. I compared emerging themes to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) framework to see if connections were made between the micro-, macro-, and exosystems and faculty onboarding and mentoring. For example, I coded for interactions that described relationships within the counseling faculty's microsystem. This approach allowed me to contextualize and analyze the data through an ecological systems lens. These segments were then assigned descriptive codes or labels, which helped to organize the data (Saldaña, 2016). The coding process allowed me to specifically look for examples in which counseling faculty defined and made meaning of their roles in working with diverse student populations and highlighted the ways that both onboarding and mentoring shaped their development as they transitioned into the field of counseling.

3. **Interpretation:** I applied an iterative process of moving between the whole and the parts of the text during this phase. I engaged in a continuous, reflexive dialogue with the data as I interpreted and reinterpreted the meanings in the context of the participants' lived experiences.
4. **Identification of themes:** I analyzed the coded data to identify patterns, connections, and emerging themes that capture the essence of the phenomenon under investigation.

- I paid particular attention to finding similarities, differences, frequency of shared practices, and comments that exist within each code.
5. **Member checking:** Since a central component of narrative inquiry is capturing authentic responses that describe an individual's perspective, I utilized member checking. I gave each participant the interview transcript and initial coding of their responses to verify that the preliminary findings were in line with their intended meaning. Participants could edit, redact, or add to the information gathered.
 6. **Integration and synthesis:** I synthesized the identified themes, offering a comprehensive understanding of the counseling faculty's lived experiences. The synthesis involved integrating the themes with relevant literature and the theoretical framework identified in the previous chapter.
 7. **Final write-up:** I then compiled synthesized themes in written dissertation form. This process involved selecting "vivid, compelling extract examples, [the] final analysis of selected extracts, relating back the analysis to the research question and literature, [and] producing a scholarly report of the analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

Positionality

As the primary investigator for this study, I identify as a White, male, queer educator who has lived in the United States all of my life. I was born and raised in Southern California. Before I began my research as a doctoral student, I began my higher education journey as a proud community college student who transferred to the UC, where I received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature. I earned a master's degree in educational counseling, which allowed me to begin working as a counseling faculty member in the community college system. In this

role, I have worked with widely diverse student populations, though most notably, my work has focused on counseling and programming for 1st-year college students, current and former foster youth, LGBTQ+, and transfer student populations. After first starting my career as a part-time adjunct at multiple campuses in southern California, I recently transitioned into a full-time tenure-track counseling faculty position. This balance of recent experience as a part-time faculty member combined with my current position, which comes with levels of privilege as a tenure-track employee, provides me with an opportunity to engage with the research participants who will have various years of experience in the field. This connection with my participants was key in encouraging open and organic discussions through narrative inquiry interviewing.

As a research practitioner, I have a passion for working with new professionals who are transitioning from their graduate programs to their first few years of being faculty members in the community college system. Despite strong master's level training, new counseling faculty enter a vast world of student needs that could not be fully captured by 2 years of graduate study. Community college counseling faculty are tasked with knowing about topics ranging from mental health coping strategies and crisis management to transfer articulation agreements and transcript evaluation policies. Furthermore, they work with students of every race, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual identity, religion, and disability status. The counseling role is equally interpersonal as it is technical. I am steadfast in my belief, both through personal experience as a student and a faculty member, that California community colleges provide opportunities for life-changing intellectual and social mobility. While there are flaws in the system, these campuses are some of the most accessible methods of social justice efforts in higher education in our country.

During my time supporting new counseling faculty transition into their roles in the community college system, I have seen new practitioners enter the field and feel overwhelmed by the amount of content and new skills needed before they feel confident in their ability to holistically serve the diverse student populations. Onboarding and mentoring are key strategies in the successful adjustment of a new professional, and empirical research that focuses on the voices and experiences of those working with students directly needs to be documented so that the state can begin to develop the best practices for the profession while working to close equity gaps. Without question, I believe that adequate support of counseling faculty is a prerequisite to an institution's demonstrated understanding of community college students' needs.

Limitations

It can be argued that the small sample of practitioners interviewed while collecting the qualitative data for this study was a limitation. This narrative inquiry yielded an exploratory study in which the experiences of practitioners provide foundational knowledge about their experiences. As a result of the exploratory nature of the study, the small sample of five participants provided rich, personal data that can only be captured by in-depth interviews. Additionally, their experiences may have been influenced by the fact that they work at campuses located in Southern California and, therefore, by regional factors that contributed to their formation of perspectives over time. A final limitation may have been that their responses may have been specific to working with the population of students who primarily reside in Southern California, which could hinder the data's generalizability. However, since empirical data related to the role of counseling faculty at California community colleges was scarce, the study still

provided foundational evidence of generalizable experiences counseling faculty share across the state.

Validity/Trustworthiness

In narrative inquiry methodology, the use of personal storytelling details the existence of multiple truths (Polkinghorne, 2007). When using narrative inquiry interviews, the expectation is that the researcher utilizes questions that allow participants to provide their perspectives and define and support them using examples so that readers can determine the study's validity.

Polkinghorne (2007) wrote that narrative researchers:

need to consider and anticipate the kind of evidence and argument the research performance will yield to justify readers' acceptance of the plausibility of the resulting claims. And in their arguments, they need to anticipate and respond to questions readers may have about the acceptability of their claims. (p.477)

Therefore, validity in this study focused on the research being grounded in the qualitative data the interviewees provided and the use of effective questioning to ensure participant data is rooted in detailed examples. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis, I engaged in various validation strategies:

1. **Member checking:** The participants and I collaboratively co-constructed the story while using narrative inquiry as part of the data collection process. To ensure that my interpretation of the narratives accurately reflected what the participant wanted to express, I applied member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To do this, I sent all participants a completed copy of their interview transcript and a first draft of their summarized narrative. Participants were asked to consider the following questions:

- (a) Does this narrative accurately represent what you have shared with me? (b) Are there any changes that need to be made so this would better represent you or what you have said?
2. **Reflexivity through audit trails:** Throughout the data collection stages, I regularly reflected and journaled my experience while reviewing questionnaire data and interacting with participants. I used this journaling to document and examine emerging assumptions, biases, and preconceptions of myself as the researcher throughout the research process to ensure that the study remained centered on participant data and not my ideas as a research practitioner.

Delimitations

For this study, I focused exclusively on the narrative experiences of individuals working as counseling faculty in the California community college system. As a result, this research did not focus on other higher education systems in the state, such as the California State University or the University of California, as these institutions utilize different counseling and advising models. Since the faculty designation of California community college counselors is unique and under-researched, this study was designed intentionally to start building a foundational knowledge of the experiences of counseling faculty in the largest system of higher education in the United States. Because the study intentionally interviewed participants with varied experiences in the field, I chose participants through purposive sampling from several different community college campuses. As noted in Chapter 2, counseling faculty often work at multiple community colleges while they are starting their profession. Therefore, participants spoke on experiences both from the campuses they worked at previously as part-time counselors and the

campuses they worked at as full-time tenure-track employees at the time of their interviews. As a result, the study's findings highlighted strong themes specific to the campuses where the participants worked but are still generalizable to campus leaders looking to better support the onboarding and mentoring of new counseling faculty.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This exploratory qualitative research study focused on better understanding the onboarding and mentoring needs of California community college counseling faculty through documentation of personal narratives provided by recently hired professionals. The California community college system serves an expansively diverse student population, and counseling faculty are tasked with providing individualized and group support to students with intersectional identities and complicated academic and personal goals. Therefore, understanding counseling faculty and their experiences is vital for those who wish to enhance community colleges' support of students from diverse backgrounds. This study asked current full-time counseling faculty, with 5 to 7 years of experience in the field, to reflect on themes related to their onboarding and mentoring to identify what support, or lack thereof, impacted their ability to meet students' needs while employed in their earliest years of being a counseling faculty member.

This chapter will reintroduce the research questions and theoretical frameworks that guided this study before briefly describing the steps used to collect the qualitative data through narrative interviews. Next, it will discuss how participants' responses informed the research questions by providing thematic findings from the qualitative data. Given that this study utilized narrative inquiry methodology, participant narratives will be provided with limited edits to ensure the qualitative data represents participant experiences.

Restatement of the Research Questions and Methodology

One overarching question and two sub-questions guided this qualitative study:

1. How do the onboarding and mentoring of community college counseling faculty reflect an institution's support of diverse student populations?
 - a. What policies and practices exist, from the counseling faculty perspective, that effectively support the onboarding and mentoring of counseling faculty?
 - b. How can an ecological framework assist in identifying recommendations on what supports for counseling faculty are necessary for institutions to be successful in their mission to support diverse students?

This exploratory study utilized narrative inquiry because of the methodology's usefulness in understanding a phenomenon, context, or experience. Using this lens, I sought to account for similarities and differences across interviews of multiple participants. To facilitate data collection, I asked each participant to provide journal responses about their experiences early on in their careers as adjunct counseling faculty. These journals allowed them to reflect on their journeys and identify emotions associated with their onboarding and mentoring. They could also submit artifacts to provide context to their stories. Included in the submitted artifacts were training materials, cover letters used to apply for early positions, and examples of professional development opportunities to which they had access early on in their careers. Finally, participants told their stories through one-on-one interviews, guided by a semi-structured protocol, in which they answered questions related to their experiences. The interview protocol was loosely designed around Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework, as questions touched on themes related to the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem level interactions that make up the development of counseling faculty (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Before writing up the

findings, I facilitated member checking with each participant to allow them to correct their data. Once approved by the participants, themes were coded and grouped into findings.

Participants Descriptions

Michael was a Latino male who at the time of the study was working as a full-time, pre-tenured counseling faculty member within the EOPS program. This program supported first-generation, low-income, and academically disadvantaged students at California community colleges. Throughout his professional journey, Michael has worked with undocumented, first-year, formerly incarcerated, current and former foster youth, ESL/non-English speaking, student-parents, and transfer students. Michael worked as an adjunct faculty member at four community colleges before being hired as a full-time, tenure-track counseling faculty member.

Tricia was a Latina female who at the time of the study was working as a full-time, tenured counseling faculty member as her campus's lead transfer counselor. Before beginning her role as a full-time counselor, Tricia primarily worked with transfer-bound, EOPS students, STEM, ESL/non-English speaking, student parents, and "returning-to-college" students. Tricia worked as an adjunct faculty member at four community college campuses before accepting a tenure-track position.

Adriana was a Latina female who at the time of the study was working as a full-time, pre-tenured counseling faculty with a dual role of EOPS counselor (50%) and Guardian Scholars counselor coordinator (50%). The Guardian Scholars program provided intentional academic counseling and support services to current and former foster youth attending select community colleges. Before her full-time role, Adriana worked with various student populations, including undocumented students, first-year, re-entry, nursing, career exploration, EOPS, foster youth, and

Puente students (Latinx students). Adriana worked as an adjunct faculty at three campuses before securing a tenure-track role.

Michelle was a Black female who at the time of the study was working as a full-time, tenured counseling faculty member in a holistic first-year student support program. The program worked with students from the time of application until graduation and/or transfer. Michelle had experience working with first-generation, Black, undocumented, LGBTQIA+, EOPS, student-parents, students on academic or progress probation, and students receiving financial aid. Michelle was employed at two community colleges as an adjunct counselor before her tenure-track role.

Celina was a Latina female who at the time of the study was working full-time as a tenured counseling faculty in general counseling services. She also taught counseling courses as part of her full-time contract. Additionally, she took on projects and training for her department related to transcript evaluation and articulation policies. Before becoming a full-time counselor, Celina worked with diverse student populations through EOPS/CARE, Guardian Scholars/Foster Youth Programs, CalWORKs/California Work Opportunity & Responsibility to Kids, the first-year Puente Program, and high school outreach. Celina was employed as an adjunct counselor at three community colleges before applying to her tenure-track role.

Findings

The findings in this chapter are grouped thematically and include analysis to connect participant data to both the main research question and the first sub question. Chapter 5 will discuss the second sub question. The findings provided valuable insights into current onboarding and mentoring practices for California community college counseling faculty working across

college campuses. The narrative data provided necessary context for both the challenges that new counseling faculty face during their early onboarding years and the factors that contribute to their success despite these challenges. Participants highlighted areas where onboarding and mentoring policies and practices were effective and identified gaps that need addressing to enhance counselors' onboarding and ongoing support. Throughout the findings, there were connections between institutional support and its impact on the diverse student populations counselors serve.

Finding 1: Freeway Flying

Participants described their experiences early in their careers as community college adjunct faculty, simultaneously working at multiple campuses. The challenges of balancing multiple college environments shed light on a situation that diverges from the norm in onboarding processes. Typically, onboarding is a single-site activity wherein new employees acclimate to one organizational culture, set of procedures, and job responsibilities. However, for newly hired counselors, this process became exponentially more complex due to simultaneous employment at multiple campuses. The interviewees described their experience as “freeway flying,” alluding to their need to travel to various campuses throughout their work week. Each college had a unique culture, policies, and expectations, creating a scenario where adjunct faculty must simultaneously adapt to multiple distinct environments. This multiplicity of onboarding experiences led to significant challenges, including inconsistent support across campuses, increased stress, and a lack of belonging. Both directly and indirectly, these challenges damaged the participants' ability to confidently serve their students.

Inconsistent Support

As participants were hired and onboarded at multiple community colleges, the variation in support and guidance across campuses led to uneven technical training, creating a disjointed experience in professional development. While some campuses facilitated structured onboarding programs, others provided little to none. For professionals who are new to the field, a lack of onboarding may be common, depending on where they are first hired after completing their graduate programs. After being hired, Tricia very quickly faced challenges. Despite having some paraprofessional experience at the campus where she worked as an adjunct counselor, Tricia remembered being underprepared:

I was [thrown in] without training. I'm guessing they thought of my [internship] experience at that college as counselor training. . . . It wasn't. The transition from paraprofessional to counseling faculty was overwhelming and made me feel insecure. I was providing help to students without knowing whether I was doing things right.

Tricia felt she had to combine her learning from her multiple campuses to slowly build her confidence. She received training at her second campus, which allowed her to apply the knowledge she gained at the other campuses. Her second campus provided strong technical training and intentional relationship-building with other faculty in her department, both part-time and full-time. Tricia submitted one of her training binders as one of her artifacts. She described it by saying, “[i]t kind of worked like a great bible for counselors coming in with no experience.” The large binder included a curriculum related to understanding the various roles of people in the department and extensive informational packets and practice activities for topics related to

working with students. She said this campus provided structured onboarding support in addition to providing this learning resource:

I had started at [my second campus], and at that time, they had a really strong training team, and I was hired with 30 other adjuncts there, or more, and we had a required 2-week training. We got a binder that was [gestures] this big with tons of info. We had so many. It was just so helpful, and that's where I was getting all my learning. And then I would apply that. I used that training to help me at [my first campus] because I never did end up getting any training [there]. But the 2-week training at [the other campus] would have lectures . . . hands-on activities, practice problems or scenarios. We got to shadow counselors in different departments, and then we were shadowed. We got to shadow drop-in counseling for two weeks. So, I feel like it was maybe . . . 6 weeks [total] before we were the ones that were actually just on our own doing our thing. And even then, we were still like, "What the heck?" because it was so much info that they had given us in training. But within the training, we built really close friendships. I felt like I had a whole community of other adjuncts who felt so lost. And that was, in itself, helpful in some way because we would use each other's help to help students.

Tricia also remembered that her second campus specifically made sure that part-time counselors who were meeting with students had access to a counselor designated to provide consultation support. This was particularly helpful for new counselors who were still learning policies and procedures at that campus.

[They] had a full-time counselor that was always . . . assigned to be the point person for adjuncts. So, if you are working from 12:00 to 4:00, you go to Jennifer. If you have

questions, you go to her, and she'll help you. And then, for the 5:00 to 7:00 crew, you go to this person. And it was on the door for all the adjuncts to see. And that was so helpful because we always knew, like, okay, at least this person knows that they're assigned to this, and we don't feel like we're being annoying because that's their job at this time.

Similar to Tricia, Adriana remembered how challenging the first few years of counseling were after receiving little onboarding support from the first campus that hired her. She did not feel she received adequate training until she was hired at her second and third campuses. She stated that the lack of official onboarding at first damaged her self-confidence. She also alluded to the fact that she had to rely heavily on other adjunct counselors who were also navigating their own onboarding experiences:

My first year as an adjunct counselor, I remember the first college I got hired at did not provide any training. I just got thrown into teaching two classes and was offered 6 counseling hours my first year. Eventually, I got picked up at two other campuses, and they provided great training. This is when I felt I [became] more competent. In the beginning, I felt very overwhelmed, incompetent, and scared. I was afraid because I did not want to do a disservice to the students, so I remember always asking questions and emailing students more information even after our appointment was over and they had left the office. I remember at my first campus trying to figure out ways to learn things I didn't know and even trying to figure out how to understand the things I should know but didn't. I was thankful that other adjuncts that were a little more seasoned than me at the time had created a folder for themselves, and they were willing to share it with me.

Unlike many newly hired faculty, Adriana already had extensive experience working in the community college system before transitioning to counseling. While her paraprofessional work prepared her to work with students, it was not enough to help her make a smooth transition into her role as a counseling faculty:

I started as a success coach, but I was really only a success coach for 2 or 3 months.

Then, I transitioned to a classified staff member. I was a student services assistant, and I got to work in [a 1st year support center]. And there, honestly, I feel like that's where I learned to be a "mini counselor." . . . So, I feel like that [partially] prepared me for when I started to adjunct. Of course, there's a lot more nuance to being a counselor, but I feel like just even having those basics down [was] very helpful because I knew what it would look like and what it meant to be a student. . . . I knew how to connect [students] or provide the assistance to them that they needed to get them started. And then, once I got hired as an adjunct, I feel like it was not my first campus that prepared me. They just threw me in there and expected me to know what I was doing when I didn't. And then, I think it wasn't until my second and third campuses that hired me, that's where I really got trained and really understood what it meant to be a counselor.

Given that she worked at multiple campuses, some of which did not train her at all and others that helped her develop her skills, Adriana provided examples of how one of her campuses facilitated training for new counselors during an intentional onboarding process:

[At one campus,] they had a 2-week boot camp for us, and they literally reviewed everything from applying as a student to pass-along classes and course substitutions, policies, and procedures at that campus. And I felt like that was very helpful. I remember

getting a huge binder that I probably still have in my car somewhere. [At another one of my campuses,] we had a 2-week boot camp as well to learn their policies and procedures. So, I felt like gaining access to that before we started was very helpful because then I didn't go in just blindly; I had an idea. They also had us shadow counselors, more seasoned counselors. That was helpful because then I got to see different counseling styles. As you know, every counselor counsels very differently, and I got to pick up what I liked and then what I didn't like and stuff like that.

She described the challenge that came with navigating multiple campuses at the same time, especially while still learning essential counseling skills. She remembered noticing differences between the campus cultures and student populations at her various campuses:

[One of the biggest challenges was] realizing that every campus is different. I think that it really hit me when I started working at three campuses. I think my only real community college experience prior to being an adjunct [was at one campus]. So, I felt like, "Oh, everyone functions like [that one]. This is how we all function." And then, when I spread my wings and I learned to fly, I realized that every campus is different. They all have a different vibe, a different feel.

Like Adriana, Celina identified the differences she experienced while freeway flying. Going beyond just initial training, Celina drew connections between the impact of being onboarded at multiple campuses simultaneously on her ability to advocate for the students she wanted to help:

I think the first [challenge] is the bureaucracy or not understanding the system because even though I was working at a community college, each community college is different.

So, not understanding that aspect, and that can be a little bit frustrating, especially when you're trying to advocate for students and trying to help them, and you need to understand what you're working with.

Celina's reflection provided context to the toll that inconsistent support takes on a counseling faculty member's ability to adequately advocate for their students and their diverse needs.

Increased Stress

Across the participants' narratives, navigating diverse environments without consistent support heightened stress levels and affected their perceptions of their ability to effectively serve diverse students. While learning at multiple sites simultaneously provided opportunities to develop overlapping knowledge, the participants also spoke to the stress that came from juggling multiple campuses' onboarding processes at once. Evidence suggested that because some colleges provide no official onboarding or training, newly hired faculty navigated their new roles and responsibilities on their own in order to reduce their workplace stress. The participants' main concern regarding this inconsistent support came from a fear of not serving their students well, so they were willing to take on the responsibility of initiating their own onboarding and training experiences. However, participants provided examples in which their campuses had them meet with students before they felt ready, resulting in ineffective counseling practices that left both the counselors and students frustrated.

Michael worked at several campuses in his first year to build his experience and begin earning money. He drew connections between the need to work at multiple campuses and his feelings of uncertainty at the beginning of his career, especially as he was working through helping students at campuses that he was still learning how to navigate himself:

In retrospect, I was overthinking a lot, but I do think being at multiple colleges at once influenced these feelings for me. During my first year, I was working at three colleges learning three different systems and policies. Oftentimes, I would be concerned that I would mix up requirements from different schools and confuse policies. Aside from these feelings, I experienced a lot of self-doubt and would question if I was capable of working in this field. The self-doubt and imposter syndrome were extremely prevalent as I was tasked with different projects, trainings, workshops, and events to lead. I feel like my first year was really me trying to stay afloat and learn while experiencing doubt and uncertainty.

Tricia discussed her rapid transition from paraprofessional to counseling faculty and that inconsistent onboarding experiences hindered her ability to help her students:

I graduated [in] May. By the next month, I was already at [my first campus] as an adjunct with zero training. . . .It was wild because I was literally thrown in. I'm never going to forget. I used to work the evening shift, so all the full-time counselors were gone, and they would just put me at the front to do drop-in, and I did not know what I was doing. So, all I kept telling students, because I was afraid of giving them wrong info, was, "Here's the IGETC," or "Here's the CSU." I recommend you come back tomorrow, which is such a disservice, I guess, to students, but it was a disservice to have me at the front without knowing absolutely anything. But clearly, I remember also students being very upset because they come from work, and the evening students are students who have families. They're busy all day. So, I used to feel so guilty turning them away. But I really did not know how to help them.

Tricia's example demonstrated the connection between an institution's support of counselor onboarding and its understanding of diverse student populations. As Tricia highlighted, the students she saw had unique needs that she was unable to meet at that point in her career. As an individual who was excited about helping students, she remembered the lack of onboarding at her first campus, which reduced her excitement as a new professional: "All of the excitement I had initially felt turned into fear of misleading students, nervousness about asking for help, and jitters because I didn't know how long I'd feel this way." Like Michael, Tricia made connections between a lack of onboarding and the stress of feeling as though she could not successfully serve her students.

Celina spoke about how various counseling assignments can require different levels of expertise depending on the students served. She reflected on the stress she felt during one of her first semesters when she was asked to teach counseling courses while also learning how to counsel students at an institution that placed a large emphasis on facilitating opportunities for students to transfer to universities and colleges:

The other [challenge] for me [was that] this was my first instructional experience. I was hired as a split assignment also. It was like, "Okay, here you're going to be teaching a class for 16 weeks." It's like, the most I've done is facilitate workshops. Now it's like, "Oh, you have to understand pedagogy." That was overwhelming in that sense, . . . [and] I don't think it's unique to our campus, but a lot of students transfer here. The amount of technical information that you have to know in order to assist students . . . because every student is unique, and they're coming with their specific questions and not feeling prepared to answer all of those questions. [At my first campus], I was in a special

program, and a lot of our conversations were mainly geared towards more of their social-emotional dilemmas or challenges. Coming [to my second campus], it felt like, “Oh, I need to know X, Y, and Z” and not fully being prepared at that time. Those were some of the challenges.

Celina’s examples highlighted that feeling prepared to meet students’ needs at one campus may not translate into confidence at a new campus due to the differences in student populations. Considering adjunct counselors were still tasked with seeing students, and in Celina’s case, also tasked with teaching, onboarding must consider the contexts of diverse populations to adequately prepare new faculty to do their best work.

Michelle remembered many challenges as an adjunct counselor who was navigating a new work environment that required her to work part-time in many areas. Though she was employed at two community colleges, at one campus, she worked in as many as six different counseling areas during one semester:

So, I would say when I was a new adjunct faculty, I think I was in like six different areas. And so, obviously, not having a specified office, I was just ripping and running. Sometimes, I’d be in a space for a few hours, and then I’d run over to another area. I think that can be a little bit challenging. There was that challenge of wanting to make as much money as possible. I was doing 30-minute lunches on a 10-hour day. I was just spent by the end, being a freeway flyer and going to a different campus each day, [so I would just reset] my mind in terms of like, “Okay, this is where I am, this is where I’m going, this is the program I’m in in this moment.” But I do think all those different experiences lend themselves to one another because, when I was working in what was

working with students on probation, I was able to bring that to when I was working with single parents and the [California Work Opportunity & Responsibility to Kids] Program. And the career-focused work I was doing in EOPs, I was able to also bring to students in a first-year experience program, or the work I did in general counseling also helps the work that I was doing in our basic skills program. So, it all was interchanging.

While Michelle identified some positive outcomes of navigating 6 different work areas at once, her experience indicated that even at one campus, there can be additional layers of onboarding that can challenge a new counseling faculty member. While some counselors, like Michelle, may have pushed through the stress of navigating different spaces with unique student populations, her examples pointed to institutional shortcomings in how adjunct counselors are supported in their transition into their roles as new faculty members.

Lack of Sense of Belonging

Due to their transient nature across multiple campuses, the participants often struggled to develop a sense of belonging or connection to any single campus community. This lack of affiliation, especially during the early years of their careers, led to feelings of isolation, which limited their impact and led them to doubt their ability to advocate for their students. They questioned their self-confidence as employees who sometimes were made to feel lesser than full-time counseling faculty.

Michael acknowledged that while there were concerns about the need to master the more technical aspects of counseling faculty, another hidden curriculum was navigating his sense of belonging as an adjunct faculty member, where his roles and connection to his environment varied by campus:

One of the biggest challenges for me was finding my role as a part-timer on a campus. I was at three very different campuses, and the perception of part-timers was very evident. Fortunately for me, I was at two campuses that valued part-time employees and allowed them to participate in projects, committees, trainings, etcetera. At those places, it was easier to get out of my comfort zone and participate in different tasks. However, at one campus, I was limited to what I could participate in because there was a strong bias around part-time counselors. My role there was very limiting and hindered my growth in some aspects.

Tricia recalled feeling a sense of isolation as a part-time counselor, “As an adjunct counselor, I always felt lonely, I think is a good way to describe it. . . .Like, eating lunch alone in the quad because I don’t know anybody, and I’m not officially part of the campus. I’m just a part-time person who comes and goes. That was hard.” She also recalled that having a lack of connection to her campus communities reduced her capacity to advocate for her students outside of her one-on-one interactions with them:

As a counselor, I really felt like I didn’t do anything other than see students . . . back-to-back on all of my campuses. And I think I was okay with that because I felt like I couldn’t even advocate for myself. How am I supposed to advocate for students in other offices and spaces? I was so intimidated by even the counselors in my office. I would have been scared to connect with other offices, knowing that I didn’t know anything. . . . I felt like I didn’t have a say. I was unimportant. . . . Like I said, part-time counselors come and go. It’s like, yeah, I don’t think I was important enough to even be the person connecting with the other offices. . . . I was so intimidated. . . . My entire first year, I

surely felt like adjunct counselors were just doing the work that the full-time counselors didn't want to do, which was seeing students back-to-back.

Tricia's example touched on the contradiction of adjunct faculty seeing the majority of students during one-on-one appointments while feeling they are least positioned to advocate for students. This highlighted the need for modified practices to better align institutional goals of supporting students with supporting the counselors most likely to meet with those students.

Like Tricia, Adriana specifically remembered that campuses made her feel either welcomed or unwelcomed, to the point of her resigning from one of those campuses. Much of her reflection focused less on the technical aspects of the new job and more on the interpersonal aspects of working with colleagues and campus communities that sometimes made her feel unwelcomed:

Sometimes, as an adjunct, you're welcome. Sometimes, you're not. So, it felt like specifically the reason I left [one campus] was because I didn't feel like that was a fit for me. It just felt like, "You're an adjunct. I'm a full-timer. This is your role. Don't overstep your boundaries." But in my head, I'm like, we're all counselors. We're all here to serve students, so I don't understand. I think, for me, that was a challenging part, realizing that every campus has its own personality within the counseling department. I felt like counseling, in general, was . . . the skills were very transferable, right? It's just learning the courses and the policies and procedures that they have to do for the most part, like transfer, at planning. That it was the same skill. It was just more about learning how to navigate these other spaces that didn't necessarily involve the student.

Despite all counselors, both full-time and part-time, being required to help students navigate challenging higher education systems, Adriana recognized a key difference in the ways she felt comfortable advocating for students as a part-time adjunct counselor:

As an adjunct, I feel like I had to express my concerns to a full-timer or to . . . the department head, or directly to the dean to express these concerns. I feel like some campuses were better about hearing me out and making sure that my voice was heard. But then there were other campuses that were just like, “Cool,” but I didn’t feel like I could go directly to the director of financial aid and be like “X, Y, and Z is happening. What can we do?” . . . because there’s always a chain of command, I guess you can say. You have to first go to your department head, and then they go to the dean, and the dean goes to the director. I remember someone in evaluations got upset at me at one of my campuses because I called them to ask about a student. And they were like, “No, you can’t be calling me. Your department head has to call me.” And I’m like, “Why? Why do I have to go through so many hoops to just ask you a question about a student that’s sitting right in front of me?”

Adriana’s context connected to Tricia’s reflections. Adjunct faculty, though they met with students who have diverse needs, were not always as equipped as their full-time colleagues due to workplace culture. These experiences shaped how Adriana feels new adjuncts should be onboarded and introduced to the campus. She reflected,

It would be helpful, just thinking ahead. When you are training these adjuncts, bringing in these directors, bringing in these deans, and allowing them to put a name to a face, or

even allowing them to meet them then and they're presenting that director [of] financial aid . . . just even helping bridge that gap.

When asked what he would envision as a best practice for onboarding and mentoring new counseling faculty, Michael spoke to the complexity of the role and how relationship development needs to be facilitated to develop comradery within departments. Without this, he felt departments fall short of maximizing their potential to provide effective services:

Building a sense of community within your department is really key. . . . I feel like doing something . . . for your department or your new hires in collaboration with others, like your current hires, is super helpful because we get to know and learn a little bit more about one another, how we can work together, how we can be effective. Because I feel like it's really difficult when we're working together, but we don't know anything about each other.

Having experienced challenges with her sense of belonging as an adjunct counselor navigating onboarding at multiple campuses, Tricia provided a poignant reflection about how campus communities need to embrace adjunct counselors for the challenges they face and the benefits they provide to their colleges:

Counselors should feel acknowledged, respected, and appreciated because they do so much work, and oftentimes, they do it while not being at work. Not that that's a good thing. . . . I give so much grace to adjunct counselors because they are freeway-flying. They are trying to figure out how they are going to pay their rent the next few months. They're living every single month not knowing if they're going to have a job the next.

So, I give them all grace, love, support, and good vibes because a community college can't run without adjunct counselors.

This final reflection reinforced the connection that supporting community college students requires supporting the counselors who see them. The manner in which institutions onboarded and supported counselors who were freeway-flying reflects their overall support system, not just for the faculty but indirectly for their diverse student populations. A challenging onboarding process that created stress could indicate broader institutional shortcomings in meeting students' needs.

Finding 2: Competencies, Training, and Professional Development

Finding 2 focused on essential competencies, training, and professional development when onboarding community college counseling faculty, revealing key sub-findings. First, all participants discussed the importance of cultural competency, though their development in this area preceded their counseling faculty roles. Instead, participants indicated that their personal values and life experiences, rather than official onboarding, helped them gain and utilize cultural competencies. Additionally, a sub-finding was that the participants emphasized technical training facilitated in culturally responsive ways. Participants did not favor separate training that served either a technical or a cultural purpose. Instead, they indicated that intentionally integrated approaches were most beneficial. Finally, while formalized onboarding opportunities were all well received, the participants indicated that their onboarding experience required independent pursuit of professional development to supplement areas where formalized onboarding fell short. The consistency of this sub-finding pointed to trends in faculty behavior to seek opportunities

that allow them to better serve their students and highlights gaps in the institutionalized onboarding process.

Cultural Competency Derived From Personal Experience

A significant finding emerged related to the essential cultural competencies of counseling faculty. Participants largely attributed their ability to effectively engage with students from diverse backgrounds to their personal experiences and innate dispositions rather than to the formal training provided by the institutions. Despite evidence of the participants feeling overwhelmed throughout their onboarding, the narratives indicated a strong sense of security in both their willingness and ability to connect with their students developed before they were hired as counseling faculty. Even when components of their onboarding seemed confusing and, at times, discouraging, the interviewees were committed to and energized by their connection to their students. As Tricia said succinctly, “Building rapport with students came easy to me, learning to be patient with them, . . . teaching them to use the tools that help build ed plans, and validating their experiences . . . all came easily to me.”

Michael acknowledged that counseling faculty are consistently tasked with working with students from backgrounds that will differ from their own. Still, he believed that counselors must remain authentic in the counseling relationship to create culturally competent environments for students. He saw this as one of his skills in connecting with diverse student populations:

I think being able to connect with [students] is important, but you also don’t need to change who you are to connect with them. So, being your true, authentic self, I think, is probably the most real you can be in this position. Because, for example, I work with formerly incarcerated students. I wouldn’t say I’m system-impacted. I have family

members who were locked up or currently locked up. We weren't as close, so I can't really say I'm system-impacted. I myself don't have carceral experience, but I'm able to connect with students just because we're able to communicate human to human. I feel like a lot of people working with diverse students or undocumented students, formerly incarcerated, foster youth students, they feel like "I need to relate. I need to connect with them on some level," and they might drop in their first meeting like, "Oh, my uncle is incarcerated." It's like, "That's great," but the student doesn't want to know that, or maybe they don't care. So, being able to just have a normal conversation and treat the students as you're working with as a human, I feel like [it] is by far the most important thing you can do. I feel like when working with diverse students or students from a diverse background, they can pick up on that super quickly. Regardless of their ethnic background or whatever, they can pick up on authenticity and how you are communicating with them.

Similarly, at the time of the study, Adriana predominantly worked with students who were current or former foster youth. This position required her to work with students to address holistic needs that often go outside of strictly academic topics. She described the key cultural competencies she utilized and that all counselors need to effectively serve the diversity of students at a community college. She highlighted having listening skills, empathy, and understanding as essential for connecting with students. She believed this made her a counselor with whom students want to connect:

Yes, you're a counselor, and you're there to provide [academic] services, but you also need to understand what the student needs and wants because they might have booked

them for an ed plan, but that's not really why they're there. So, being able to ask questions to understand why they're really there, I think it's important because a lot of the times, and I've seen this with other counselors, right away they're like, "Okay, based on the notes, this is your major, and then you want to transfer." So, they just crank out an ed plan. But it's like, why is the student really there? So, I guess just the ability to be personable, understanding, and a good listener. But also, like, encouraging, letting the student know that they are not alone, that you're there to help them however you can. I found that that really goes a long way. And a lot of the time, I have all those students return because they feel like I'm someone that they felt comfortable with.

When asked about how she felt navigating the social-emotional aspects of supporting students as a faculty member, Celina remembered this is what she felt most prepared to do after graduating and building on her paraprofessional experiences:

Yeah, that definitely felt more natural to me. Again, that's what I had been doing, obviously not in a professional manner, but, still, I feel like the foundation of counseling is really listening, empathizing, and validating. That I felt comfortable with, the counseling skills, and I felt like my [graduate] program did a really good job preparing me for that, too. That I felt comfortable with. If you wanted to talk all day about your personal life, that I felt comfortable with.

In combining her work experience at the community college and her ability to connect with students quickly, Celina described how said that, over time, she felt like she began to know her students and their needs so well that she could almost begin to anticipate how her counseling

sessions would unfold. Still, she talked about the need to remain present in the counseling process to be sure that each student felt heard and validated:

In all honesty, sometimes even the more experience you get, you're like, "Ah, . . . I know what you're going through." Sometimes, I feel like I'm [able to] complete the sentences for the students. And nine times out of 10, I could probably complete their sentence. I know where they're going, but you have to go through the process and remember to listen. I think now, rightfully so, equity is really a huge [counseling competency]. After undergoing a lot of the equity training, I think the basic components is just to be kind, be empathetic. That is so important to understand that a lot of these things, it's not like . . . I could give you higher level technical things that you should know, but I think at the very core, it's like try to relate with somebody else who is another human being who is going through a stage in their life that maybe you've gone through or maybe you haven't. But it's so important to try to connect with them at that level so you can understand what their needs are.

When reflecting on her onboarding, Michelle identified the things that came naturally to her without the need for support from her institution. Michelle felt her ability to connect with her students was an area of strength, even early on in her career. She also described how these innate skills helped her build connections that allowed her to successfully transition into more intentional academic counseling conversations:

Building rapport quickly with students always came really easy for me. I can work a room very quickly, so some students would connect with me during group presentations, but where I really shined was in the one-on-one space. I remember having students

making excessive appointments with me because they just wanted to be around me, and I provided a sense of comfort and stability. My counseling appointments stayed booked. I didn't really have time to breathe. I had to learn how to set some boundaries with students. Although looking back, I made some really close connections with students that first year, it was not sustainable. Over time, I started to utilize that quick rapport to my benefit to really get at the heart of what was going on with students, their goals, and what was getting in the way of their success.

Michelle's ability to connect with students was not something acquired throughout the onboarding process, yet she identified this as key to helping her do her work effectively.

Technical Skills and Cultural Responsiveness

An additional sub-finding came from the participants' reflections on the onboarding opportunities their institutions provided. While the participants emphasized proficiency in both technical skills and cultural responsiveness, their narratives suggested that integrated learning opportunities that taught technical skills through culturally responsive frameworks were the most helpful form of onboarding. While some participants provided examples of integrated approaches, the data largely suggests institutional gaps in the design of training offered. Celina reflected on her initial onboarding and believed that she had a positive experience because she had opportunities to train in topics related to the technical support of students while also building on her previous knowledge of working with diverse student populations. She contextualized the time in her career when she was onboarded through intentional interactions with experienced counselors, even when the interactions were not meant to be official onboarding practices.

I was in graduate school during the recession. When I got out, it was like almost no counseling jobs were available. There wasn't any [formal internships] that actually prepared you like I see now. . . . But luckily, [at one of my campuses,] they were really good about training in a sense, even if they didn't have the formal program then. I remember one of the counselors . . . was really adamant: "You need to spend the first month getting to know this. We don't want to rush you and put you in front of students until you feel comfortable and make sure that you understand." And, looking back, I see, too, that she didn't want to put an inexperienced counselor in front of students and potentially giving the wrong information, but that really helped me and gave me the time to grow professionally because I was able to shadow counselors for that long. So that really helped me. And then I think for me also what helped me was just my background as a [paraprofessional], working with special programs just because within where I was working, it was EOPS [Extended Opportunities Programs and Services], CARE [Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education] , Puente, CAYFES, and Guardian Scholars. I got exposure to five special counseling programs, which all have their different requirements, which all their student population is different. That just gave me really great exposure.

Celina's learning environment intentionally provided opportunities for her to learn about different student populations and their needs while also actively working on supporting her technical knowledge to make sure she was able to adequately meet the academic needs of the students she saw.

When asked to consider what onboarding opportunities were helpful in his development once he was hired, Michael identified that both technical topics utilized for academic advising and topics related to student development were helpful. In addition, he provided examples of integrated learning opportunities that taught best practices for academic counseling in culturally responsive ways. He believed these training sessions best prepared him because they were more closely aligned with the reality of the student-counseling relationship:

There was a lot of on-the-job training regarding how to process different [exam] scores or how to work with students with a very unique case, but it was all academic-focused. The ones that I feel that are really helpful for me ... are the “ally trainings.” I feel like ally trainings for certain populations, even if I feel like I already know the information or I might be familiar a little bit with it, I feel like those are the most helpful because those are the most real for our job. The academic stuff is important, but I feel like if the student is struggling, the academics are not what we should be talking about.

Through his artifact submissions, Michael described “ally trainings” in his own words to provide context to their impact on his ability to learn more about the diverse student populations with whom he would work:

Ally trainings are a training or series of trainings that help provide context and resources for supporting specific student groups. For example, there are LGBTQ+, undocumented, formerly incarcerated, and foster youth ally trainings. Traditionally, ally trainings are focused on underrepresented and marginalized communities. I found these to be extremely helpful in understanding how to best support the diverse students we work with. These ally trainings tend to include typical student challenges, concerns, identities,

stigmas, best practices, etcetera. It is really helpful for a new counselor to learn about these because everyone has biases, and being able to identify these biases and work through them early on in your career can be very beneficial. Similar to these ally trainings, there are also cultural group awareness events/workshops that promote cultural competence and general awareness.

Participating in these types of learning opportunities allowed Michael to better understand both the academic and cultural needs, as well as the unique counseling considerations of various student groups. This provided an example of facilitating technical training through a culturally responsive lens. Now that Michael had years of experience, when asked for specifics about the competencies needed to be an effective counselor to diverse student populations, he was direct in emphasizing the cultural and interpersonal aspects of his counseling role over technical advising skills:

I feel like the academics do not matter. I feel like that's probably crazy to hear from a counselor, but I feel like the academics is important to a certain extent, but that's not . . . [pause] you don't need to be an expert on that to be in this position. I think what we need to be is great listeners, be able to check your biases and understand the students that you're working with, being able to meet them where they are, and then have some empathy. You don't have to be the most empathetic person, but have some empathy where if somebody is really coming to you and sharing some stuff, you're not just going to be like, "Well, I completely understand, but we need you to take this physics class."

In a similar way, Tricia identified some of the dangers of counseling services that weigh too heavily on technical academic advising without cultural competency:

[At times, counseling] was like the DMV. There were hundreds of students waiting to get a one-semester educational plan. . . . The goal was to get students onboarded and have them have [the] application done, orientation done, and one semester at least ed plan done so students start on the right track. We quickly realized that this didn't necessarily work because we weren't building any relationships with students. We weren't taking into account their major. It was just like "math, English, and then have them pick two other classes". . . . There was no "Welcome, I'm glad you're here. Tell me about your story." There was no validating why they were there and telling them about all the resources available. It was just very transactional. . . . I still think it is that way because we're so caught up on numbers and making sure every single person has a one-semester educational plan . . . and obviously, we don't have millions of counselors where we can touch every single student even though we wish we could. I think they're trying. . . . We, as a campus and a lot of colleges, are trying their best, and I think it's a good intention. It's just not enough.

To ensure that counseling services did not over-emphasize technical advising over interpersonal work, Tricia placed a much larger emphasis on campus-specific onboarding that allows counselors to better learn the cultures of the populations served at that campus:

I think every campus should have trained me on the student population that I was serving and just learning about the basic norms or customs of the cultures of the students that I was going to be working with. . . . I grew up in San Gabriel Valley, where it's predominantly, I would say, like, Asian and Latino. I didn't know anybody else. I knew other cultures existed, but I didn't know of the norms.

Like Michael, Tricia saw value in being exposed to formal opportunities to engage with topics related to meeting the needs of diverse student populations. While counseling faculty brought their lived experiences into their work, opportunities to grow in their cultural competencies allowed them to feel more confident in their ability to holistically support students. Still, Tricia placed value on the technical requirements for specific training for new professionals, but she advised that technical training can still be culturally relevant:

I think the number one goal for many community college students is transfer, so I really think that every single campus needs to have a very robust transfer training that is culturally relevant. And so, when I say that, I say, yes, include all the CSU-UC requirements, all the weird facts [about how to transfer], but also include what resources are available when it comes to transfer for certain populations. So, there's a *PASS* program. This program is meant to help students transfer, and it's catered specifically to these students. And then, when you transfer to the UC or CSU, there's also opportunities for help for students who are Latino or Black or whatever it may be, letting them know that a person's personal background is involved in the transfer process. And we'll be involved in the retention piece for when they graduate, too, because we can't do it alone. We're going to need resources and help along the way. So, transfer training is important, but include a cultural component to your transfer training.

At the time of the study, Adriana primarily worked with low-income, educationally disadvantaged, and current and former foster youth students. While working with students who were often marginalized in institutions of higher education, interpersonal counseling techniques were at the root of conversations with them. Interestingly, even though her specific counseling

assignments required approaches that go beyond academic advising, Adriana still emphasized the need for all newly hired counseling faculty to be well-trained in academic policies and procedures, indicating again that integrated approaches are essential for the success of both counseling faculty and their students:

Like I mentioned before, every campus is different: policies, procedures, the way things are handled, articulations, and the way articulations handle transcripts. . . . So, just like having a foundation of that understanding . . . how to calculate a GPA, what it means for a course to be equivalent, be it a UC, CSU and UC, or even just a CC across a CC. I think those are all important things to understand and should probably be given more attention because you can easily mess up somebody's ed plan. STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics] majors, nursing, I feel like those are all areas that really need more work and attention because I feel like, in those areas, you can easily mess a student up. And then even general ed, I feel like it's easy once you get the hang of it, but in the beginning, it can be very confusing and complex.

Adriana believed technical training needs to focus on how to be a counselor at each specific institution. She said that a strong understanding of the technical skills for accurately advising students can allow counselors to connect with students on larger interpersonal and cultural topics. Finding this balance between the two created an impactful counseling environment for students wherein they receive the support they need to succeed in higher education. She stated:

I just think some people don't really understand the impact that we have on students. Like, yes, educational planning is important, and we want to make sure we're giving them the right courses. I think as an adjunct, I didn't fully understand this because you're

only there a certain amount of the time, and you're just like, "I'm just here to do my job," but I think what I learned later on in my adjunct years and I now as a full-timer, some students just need someone to talk to. And sometimes you're the only person there. So remembering that they're human, too, I think is important. And I think that also helps your counseling go to a different level. Because you can crank out an educational plan in 15 minutes, really, if you know the core sequences, but the conversations that you have with students are also important.

Independent Pursuit of Professional Development

While the study observed that the participants positively received all professional development opportunities offered by the institutions, a common theme was that they frequently had to independently seek out additional opportunities to feel more competent in meeting their students' needs. They described these opportunities as separate from the onboarding that their institutions facilitated. The consistency of this sub-finding pointed to a trend in faculty behavior to seek opportunities to better serve their students and highlights gaps in the institutionalized onboarding process in terms of bringing these learning opportunities to new counselors in a structured way.

Adriana found that training was important in her development. Specifically, she said on-campus training was essential for her, especially while working as an adjunct faculty because the content was specific to the campus where she worked and because on-campus training usually happened during the workday when adjunct counselors, who are paid hourly, were compensated for attending. Scheduling and a lack of compensation made attending outside learning opportunities a challenge. She said:

I think [on-campus training was] the main ones [I could attend] just because everything was in person at the time. It was like if you didn't go to work, then you didn't get paid. That's the situation. I felt like I tried to limit the conferences I went to, but any opportunity that I got on campus where I was working, they allowed me to do professional development within. I definitely tried to take advantage of that.

Adriana believed more could be done, both for new adjuncts and new full-time counselors. She attributed much of her success to the learning opportunities she was provided or sought on her own. A more intentional onboarding experience may have been more desirable, but her commitment to her learning early on in her career had long-term effects on her ability to work with students as a full-time counselor:

Yeah, I think onboarding is something that really needs to be taken more seriously because even [the campus that I am at now as a full-time counselor] as a whole onboarded me to be a faculty, I feel like the counseling department has not. I'm still trying to figure out how to be a decent counselor here. . . . I'm just thankful that I did have training, really good training as an adjunct because that really helped me hone in on my counseling skills and perfect, not perfect them, but strength within them that I didn't feel as lost. . . . So, I think onboarding is just so important, and I wish all counseling departments would take that very seriously.

Given that her campus was heavily focused on supporting transfer students, Celina spoke about outside conferences that made her feel more confident in her ability to advise prospective transfer students. She highlighted conferences that intentionally trained counselors who assist students in transferring to the UC, the CSU, and even private universities. She felt the policies

related to these systems were so complex that she needed to get more exposure to these topics to better equip her for her work with students:

Well, again, because of transfer, that was my focus, and trying to understand that more because you have to know the rules for these campuses. I remember making a point to attend ETS [Ensuring Transfer Success], which was really, really, really informative, the CSU conferences, and trying to go to as many private school community college days to learn more about those programs just because for students to navigate that is crazy. We can barely understand it sometimes. Those are the conferences that I attended to try to get to know better those services.

While it may not have been unreasonable for new professionals to look to conferences for learning opportunities, Celina's example indicated that her onboarding on its own did not fulfill her comprehensive needs, so she sought out additional ways to learn to meet her students' needs. New faculty may have been encouraged to attend these external professional development options, but the consistency of participants looking to outside training raises questions on whether institutionalized onboarding lacks the comprehensive support that new counseling faculty need to feel confident in their roles.

Like Celina, Michelle remembered being intentional about working toward opportunities to develop her confidence and leveraging the support systems available to her while growing as a counseling faculty member. Michelle spoke about the positive effects of having access to both thorough on-campus training and access to off-campus training and conferences. Overall, she felt supported by those around her when she identified ways that she wanted to grow as a new counselor. She said:

I found that if there was something that I wanted to learn about or to do, oftentimes, I was supported in doing that. So, whether it was like going to a conference or going to whichever [professional development], I don't think I've ever had anyone say "no" to me when I'm like, "Oh, hey, I want to go to this conference" or "I want to check this out." Sometimes, it's figuring out where's the money to do that thing, but overall, I was always supported in trying to figure out how to best serve students because that's what it all comes back to . . . And then I would say, in general, my campus did a really good job with offering trainings. There were a lot of different trainings that I had an opportunity to attend, especially when I was first starting as both an adjunct counselor and as a "newer-ish" full-time tenure track counselor.

Luckily, Michelle's campus had opportunities for on-campus training. Still, in connecting to Finding 1, newly hired adjunct faculty may be limited in their ability to attend all of these opportunities due to their commitments at multiple community colleges. While her campus supported her in pursuing her own learning opportunities, Michelle's example demonstrated that this learning was often self-initiated:

In my faculty] evaluations, I would make goals, and I felt like I was supported in having the space and time to really seek those out. So, I think an example was I remember having a goal of getting a better understanding of how to support students who receive services from our disability support services, having meetings with the director, and meeting with the individuals that worked there and understanding the supports and services. Going to trainings really helped me to also communicate that to students who sometimes may feel some shame or stigma from previous experiences and receiving

those services and being able to articulate it and be like, okay, this is like, what you can get. And that's something that sometimes arises in that building rapport with students and understanding, okay, what's going on here? And so being able to make that connection, I think, is really valuable.

The participants' examples highlighted a preference for maximizing on-campus learning opportunities during their onboarding. While conferences played an important role in professional development, an over-reliance on outside training, especially when they were mostly employee-initiated, indicated a lack of intentionality in formalized onboarding processes. In contrast, Tricia provided a positive example of a strategy her campus used to provide her with formalized learning opportunities during her workday and as an official part of her onboarding. She recalled the usefulness of rotating to different counseling areas as a form of professional development while observing other counselors in their sessions with students. Arguably, this was an onboarding process that required little institutional resources, yet this proved to be affirming for Tricia as she was exposed to best practices for working with various populations at her campus. She said:

I had the opportunity as a new adjunct to be rotated amongst different departments. . . . I clearly remember being placed in the STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics] center, with [English as a Second Language] students, first-year students, with undocumented students, [and] with EOP's students. And that was also really, really, helpful because I got to see the different populations that this campus serves firsthand. And if you ever shadow counseling appointments, you'll see that it's never just academic. And when you sit through these different departments, you learn about the experiences of

ESL students. And I remember listening to their stories and feeling inspired. . . . And then STEM was crazy. I was scared of STEM because [of the course] sequences. I thought they were so long, but you learn. I learned a lot from shadowing counselors who were comfortable working with STEM students [and] shadowing counselors who were really good at knowing all the ESL sequences and then introducing them to the regular English sequence.

While it was understood that all learning opportunities had value, especially for newly hired counseling faculty, the narrative data pointed to a systemic reliance on individual faculty initiative, which potentially undermines the consistency and effectiveness of onboarding. As a result, faculty often sought professional development to supplement areas of learning where their institutions fell short. While the participants demonstrated a willingness to seek out these opportunities because of their direct benefit to the diverse student populations that they serve, this trend also pointed to an inconsistent institutional commitment to understanding and supporting the needs of diverse student populations.

Finding 3: Effectiveness of Informal Mentoring

Informal mentoring emerged as a valuable aspect of the participants' experiences, especially in navigating administrative processes and building relationships and networks. The participants appreciated the support and guidance from more experienced colleagues, which was often not part of a formal program. This informal mentorship was crucial in helping them adjust to different campus environments and in providing practical insights and advice.

In thinking about how mentors shaped his onboarding experiences, Michael said that informal mentorship and informal mentoring opportunities had a greater impact on his development than formal ones:

I don't think I had an official mentor as a part-timer. As a full-timer, now I do. But to be honest, I feel like I don't need an official one because the one that I currently have, I'm not super close with . . . and even before I was a part-timer, it was other colleagues or other people I was cool with that maybe we were friends or whatever, but I would utilize their knowledge as . . . I would ask them questions. They would serve as unofficial mentors. . . . It's mainly other people that I've connected with, like our chair, our Guided Pathways lead, people in other roles I've been able to connect with and chop it up with. I felt like that's a lot more helpful, the natural mentorship.

Through unofficial mentors from other new adjunct faculty, newer full-time counselors, and some seasoned full-time counselors, Michael began to develop his confidence. This support helped him to develop his confidence while working with students. He said,

At the [campus] that I mentioned, it was really like, "Oh, you're part-time? You can't really do much." I don't want to say like "glass ceiling," but it was hard to break through to the full-timers because there was so much tension. . . . But at one of the schools, there were two full-timers in the office I was at who were super helpful and carried me through my first couple of years. . . . And then also people that I was able to really connect with and became friends with, those I think were probably the most meaningful because they helped me navigate certain challenges or student cases.

Michael, who at the time of the study was in a full-time tenure track position, brought all of his experience from his onboarding and mentoring into his new full-time role. Like he did with his students, he demonstrated empathy when working with newly hired counselors. He made himself available to new counselors and had volunteered to be an official mentor. He provided context for the ways mentoring can mitigate negative experiences like the stress he remembers during his early years as a counselor. He stated:

When I'm meeting with a new counselor, or let's say, like, an intern who's getting ready to apply or interview, I let them know what my experience was, and I help them identify their key people. If I'm one of them, maybe serve as a mentor, an official mentor. I'm volunteering for next year to be a mentor for new interns coming up, ideally who we would hire. . . . I'm volunteering for that because I feel like it's super helpful to have somebody or just have those conversations, those real conversations, so people can understand. They don't necessarily need to know everything or what's most important or what they should prioritize in their experience. So, I feel like that's been really helpful. I feel like I've become a lot more patient with myself and then trying to share that with other counselors, other new faculty members or new hires because it's super stressful. I feel like I'm still stressed, but to a certain level. I feel like, as a new faculty member, I was overly stressed because I was trying to do everything or trying to just make sure I was doing everything right. I feel like having those conversations and maybe, I guess, sharing that they should be a little bit easier on themselves or not take it as seriously. I feel like it's really helpful in the onboarding process for new faculty members, especially in the place I'm at because there's a lot of older faculty. . . . For us to have those

relationships and get to connect with our new faculty members because unfortunately, there's different thought processes and everything with the different faculty members. I feel like that's where I'm at. I want to be an official mentor or an unofficial mentor, but I want to be able to guide people up to their new position because I feel like there wasn't a lot when I was coming up as a part-timer for me.

Michelle attributed much of her success to strong, intentional mentors. She realized early on that her mentor was a key part of her building a successful foundation in the community college system:

I had a very strong mentor even before I became an adjunct faculty, so from the time of my internship . . . and I also found additional mentors along the way. And I think maybe it's in part just like my personality. People just gravitate towards me. And so, I think for some of those additional ones, I look back, and I realize there were some that I should have followed up more on, but I had such a great one. I was like, this is all I need. I definitely had a lot of really good people around me supporting me and just giving me insight into this new adventure that I was undertaking. From the point of starting as an adjunct to when I landed that full-time, tenure-track role, I felt very supported. Anytime I had a question, I always had individuals who I could go to just get their insight and their input. I think for me, that was definitely there.

When thinking about her onboarding, Adriana identified the important roles that other counselors played in helping her. She spoke about taking it upon herself to find these helpful individuals to help her build her network of support. Like Michael, Adriana identified mentorship as a tool for overcoming the challenges of being at multiple campuses:

One strategic thing that I did do was try to find a mentor at each campus, and I think that was helpful because then I had someone to go to for guidance. I asked a lot of questions. I would go around asking questions to different counselors. I tried not to just choose one person, but if I felt comfortable with someone, they were my go-to, and I would make sure to write down whatever questions I asked and write down the answers. I had, like, a log. That way, I wasn't going back asking the same question multiple times. If I did, it's fine, but I tried to look at my notes beforehand, especially when I was at three campuses. It was a little rough.

At all of her campuses, unofficial mentorship was something Adriana had to seek out herself:

I feel like it was very self-driven. There wasn't a, like, "You're a new counselor, this is your mentor." It was just you- that had to be on you. And so, I made it a point to find someone that would be willing to mentor me or take me under their wings.

She reflected on how these unofficial mentors helped boost her confidence in the department and the profession:

I felt like [mentorship] really helps me in terms of understanding certain things, not just on how to be a counselor, but how to navigate being a counselor in that department. And also, I guess it just helps me feel more confident, too, because I had someone reassuring me that I was doing things correctly. Or even sometimes I would get stuck in a student scenario, and I would go and be like, okay, this is what's going on? . . . I really wish that would be a requirement for every campus to have a mentor for new faculty, . . . whether full-time or part-time, really.

Specifically, Adriana remembered learning how to navigate working with outside offices to help her get her job done effectively. The three offices she remembered partnering with the most included admissions and records, evaluations, and financial aid. Additionally, she remembers student programs like Puente, STEM, Extended Opportunity Programs and Services, and the career services center as being especially helpful in getting student support while on campus. Despite having all of these offices to work with, there was no training on how to establish these connections. Instead, she figured out how to foster these relationships on her own. She mentioned, “There wasn’t any [training]. It was just ‘find a nice person that’s willing to help you’ because not everyone in other offices is willing to help you, you know?” This work of figuring out allies on campus was also supported by the networking done with her mentors.

Adriana stated:

I had mentors or other friends who were already more seasoned counselors that they were like, “Oh, try and find that one person that’s willing to help you and make nice with them.” And just to keep that relationship, at the end of the year, I would send these people a Starbucks gift card or something just to show my appreciation. And I felt like that helped.

Celina made connections between when she was hired as an adjunct counselor and the lack of official mentoring opportunities at the time. As a result, she attributed much of her learning to the environment that one of her campuses created that allowed new counselors to learn from each other and from more seasoned counselors. She established unofficial mentors who assisted her in gaining her confidence as a counseling faculty member. She said that the

counselors in her department were aware that a culture of mentorship, even if unofficial, made sure counselors did not give students incorrect information. She said,

Again, there weren't any official [mentoring] programs. But again, luckily, the school where I started just was a great environment where people were willing to offer unofficial mentorship, where people were willing to take me under their wings and explain things to me. What I really loved about the college that I found even unique after working at multiple colleges is that everybody was like, if you have a question, feel free to knock on my door. If you interrupt, don't worry. Everybody, at least at that time, was like, we would rather that you come and ask than you give the wrong information to information. So, I never felt like a burden or anything like that. So, it just felt like, okay, I have these mentors that I could ask questions to. And the other thing is I was given opportunities to work on projects pretty early on in my adjunct career. And that was good because I was able to forge relationships and work with people. I worked with a counselor who was very experienced [and] who had over 20 years of experience, and she was wonderful. She was able to answer questions, and I learned so much from just working with her and absorbing her knowledge. It was a great partnership in that sense. And I felt lucky to have that opportunity because I don't know if most colleges would put this novice with this master, but lucky for me, they did, and they took a chance, and I learned a lot.

Celina identified the ways that she now gives back to new adjunct faculty through unofficial mentoring to create a better onboarding environment for new professionals. Her experiences informed her willingness to give back in preparing others to feel confident while working with students:

I think I always just go back to my first experience. My first experience at this college was so wonderful. It was so welcoming. It was so, again, just very open that I tried to now emulate that and be that source for other counselors. Whenever they have questions, I'm always like, interrupt me. It does not matter. There is no stupid question. I always try to say that because I remember being that counselor, being like, "Oh, this is a pretty stupid question." And feeling like, "Oh, I don't want to ask, but I have to ask, or else I'm going to give an incorrect answer." I [was] just trying to make sure that I take away that nervousness for other counselors and try to make myself available because I know that's the other thing, especially now with this remote environment or hybrid environment where it's like counselors, as I mentioned, mine was like, we could go next door to the office and knock on their door and ask them questions. Now, sometimes, they may not know. They may not know who to email. That's why I try as much as possible to be very responsible for emails, teams, things like that, because if they have a question, because that student is usually with them, and the student needs to know the answer.

Tricia also identified mentorship early in her career as necessary for her to transition from paraprofessional to adjunct faculty and from adjunct faculty to full-time faculty. While Tricia remembered mostly benefitting from the influence of unofficial mentors, she also had exposure to official mentoring relationships through a program at one of her campuses, which allowed her to better navigate the complexity that comes with adjunct counseling faculty roles. She identified that this official mentoring support built on the training provided at her campus and also touched on long-term career planning.

[One of my campuses had a] very strong mentorship program, and this was run by a full-time counselor. This program, unfortunately, no longer exists, but adjunct counselors were invited to participate. We got an email with all the full-time counselors who were interested in being a mentor. And that email had their photo, their biography, why they want to be a mentor and their goals for mentoring whoever they end up mentoring. And, so, we were asked to pick three out of all the counselors there, and then you were assigned one. And then from there, that was your mentor. . . . You'd meet with them several times throughout the semester, and they provide mentorship, helping you with the onboarding, helping you with questions, but also helping you learn about how to land full-time counseling positions, how to navigate community college politics, and just introducing you to the entire community college counseling world, being a freeway flyer. . . . And still, to this day, I'm really, really close to the person that was assigned to me as a mentor, and I'm just really grateful for that opportunity because it built a really close relationship.

Tricia also highlighted how mentoring relationships filled gaps in her onboarding experience. She described having no official training on how to help students transfer. She attended conferences offered by the UC and CSU systems that supported community college counselors in helping students navigate complicated transfer policies. While these learning opportunities were available, attending the conferences was not enough to make her feel confident in transfer advising. She said,

I would [attend local conferences] even when I was in grad school. I wasn't even a counselor yet, and I was already trying to attend the local CSU conference or the UC

conference. Those were also always really helpful because transfer training was very limited at both of my campuses. So, these conferences really helped teach me about transfer. And then I also really like that the UC campus always had “transfer for beginners” and “transfer for advanced.” So, there I was in the beginner session, but my campus didn’t offer that. I didn’t get any transfer training, not even in that thorough two-week training. We never went in-depth with transfer.

Interestingly, despite recalling a lack of official onboarding related to topics of transfer policies, Tricia navigated unofficial mentoring support to become proficient in transfer policies. She discussed the personalized mentoring support she received from a colleague who helped her become an expert in community college transfer policies:

All of my second year, I was under the supervision of a counselor who really took the time to train me in checking for degree completion, and that taught me to be extra detailed while simultaneously becoming really good at counting and converting units from UC, CSU, out state, processing evaluations, etc. I knew what to look for when it came to students transferring and completing degrees. Having someone who mentored and trained me to have a critical eye boosted my counseling confidence, and today, I still give all the credit for what I know to this colleague.

Tricia’s experiences spoke to the benefits of official and unofficial mentoring. Despite the inconsistencies in Tricia’s onboarding process, she attributed much of her success to mentorship opportunities. She was so successful in seeking opportunities for self-development that Tricia later became a full-time, tenured transfer counselor, which is a specialized role at many community colleges. Tricia’s trajectory from a new professional with no access to transfer

training at her institution to a full-time transfer counselor due to intentional mentorship indicated the lasting impact that access to formative mentorship opportunities can provide.

Summary of Findings

The findings provided valuable insights into the current state of onboarding and mentoring practices for California community college counseling faculty working across different college campuses. The narrative data provided necessary context for both the challenges that new counseling faculty face during their early onboarding years and the factors that contribute to counselor success despite these challenges. Participants highlighted areas where onboarding and mentoring policies and practices were effective, as well as identified gaps that need to be addressed to enhance the onboarding and ongoing support of counselors in the field.

The study uncovered significant insights into the onboarding and mentoring experiences of community college counseling faculty, particularly adjuncts who faced the unique challenge of freeway flying across multiple campuses. These faculty members encountered diverse cultures, policies, and expectations, leading to inconsistent support, heightened stress, and a diminished sense of belonging. Despite these challenges, the importance of cultural competency, culturally responsive technical training, professional development, and informal mentoring emerged as key themes. The findings also underscored a reliance on faculty competencies and initiative over formalized onboarding processes to bridge institutional gaps.

Discussion of Findings

This study centered on counseling faculty within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model, comprising microsystems, mesosystems, and exosystems. It posited that every

individual operates within their unique ecological system. Central to this study, counseling faculty are integral to students' microsystem, suggesting their ecological systems significantly influence those of the students. The study applied Bronfenbrenner's (1979) framework to onboarding and mentoring, viewing the ecological environment as a network of interrelated sub-environments. As indicated by the findings, each level plays a vital role in counseling faculty's onboarding and mentoring processes. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model portrays the onboarding and mentoring environment as a complex system of interacting layers, each contributing to an individual's success within an organization. The participants' narratives provided an essential understanding of how counseling faculty experience onboarding and mentoring within these systems. Data indicated the need for institutions to support the needs of diverse community college students more adequately by intentionally supporting counseling faculty.

Microsystem in the Onboarding and Mentoring of Counseling Faculty

The microsystem includes the immediate environment in which an individual operates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For counseling faculty, the microsystem included the specific campuses where they work. The findings indicated that the traditional onboarding model fails to address the unique challenges of working across multiple sites within this microsystem. The traditional model of onboarding, designed for a single-site experience, fell short in addressing the unique needs of individuals working across multiple sites, as evident in the challenges faced by adjunct faculty at community colleges. Counseling faculty working at multiple sites had to adapt to various skills and knowledge needed at each campus, creating multiple microsystems in which the counselor must navigate in order to do their work. While relationships with official and unofficial mentors may have provided some relief, the multiplicity of onboarding experiences at

different campuses results in inconsistent support, which hindered their ability to acquire a uniform set of skills and knowledge and contributes to increased stress and feelings of isolation. Despite the microsystem being the most basic level, counseling faculty should not have been assumed to thrive without formalized onboarding since each campus has its own culture, policies, and expectations, which could vary significantly. As a result of inconsistencies in support and onboarding experiences that emerged from the narratives, there existed a pressing need for a reimagined onboarding approach that accommodates the complexities of multi-site employment, ensuring consistent support, fostering a sense of belonging, and ultimately enhancing the overall efficacy of adjunct faculty in their roles.

Additionally, since interactions between counseling faculty and students happened at the microsystemic level, technical training and cultural competency played crucial roles in the development of counseling faculty. Technical training provided them with the skills necessary for their specific roles, while cultural competency was key to effectively engaging with the students' diverse backgrounds. Counseling faculty felt confident in their ability to connect with students, though professional development opportunities that exposed them to more advanced training about diverse student populations and their needs were well received. An integrated onboarding process that combined these two aspects was essential for fostering an inclusive and effective learning environment at this microsystem level.

As was evident in the narratives, this support for counseling faculty directly connected to an institution's support of diverse students at the college. Positive examples of onboarding and mentoring at this level included access to ally training and rotating to different counseling areas to observe experienced counselors work with students to learn best practices unique to that

population. This exposure helped increase counselor knowledge while providing them with opportunities to make microsystem-level connections to colleagues, both of which enhance their ability to effectively support students.

Mesosystem in the Onboarding and Mentoring of Counseling Faculty

The mesosystem referred to the interconnections between the interactions happening within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For the participants, this involved interactions between different departments or faculty on the college campus. Examples included learning to navigate relationships between counseling departments and other student services on campus, like financial aid and academic affairs. At this level, it was evident that effective onboarding practices often included mentoring opportunities that allowed the interviewees to navigate the relationships that are a part of the mesosystem level. Both unofficial and official mentoring played an important role at this level, though findings indicated that the two were unintegrated. Official mentoring ensured structured growth, consistency in training, and access to institutional resources.

In contrast, unofficial mentors often provided insights and guidance based on personal experiences, thus filling gaps that structured mentoring and onboarding programs might miss. For newly hired adjunct faculty, unofficial mentoring came from full-time counseling faculty, seasoned adjunct faculty, or other newly hired individuals who served as peer-level support. These interactions directly influenced counseling faculty's mesosystem level onboarding development, as participants noted that understanding how to navigate these interactions was essential in their attempts to help their students navigate their institutions.

Exosystem in the Onboarding and Mentoring of Counseling Faculty

Influence from the exosystem level included settings or events that the individual did not directly experience but still affect them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Examples of influence at the exosystem level in the context of community colleges were district-level policies that impact the daily lives of faculty and students, healthcare and mental health services, school boards, and local politics. Given that counseling faculty assisted students in navigating complex higher education systems, participants provided many examples of these influences, including local financial aid policies, admissions policies for transfer institutions, and funding restrictions that influence how counseling faculty work with students. The findings suggested that despite being affected by these influences, onboarding may not have adequately address exosystem-level topics, especially for newly hired counselors.

The findings from the exosystem included the interaction between different campuses where counseling faculty were simultaneously hired, onboarded, and maintained employment. Inconsistencies of training from one campus to the next meant that a counseling faculty's ability to meet the needs of students required self-initiated integration of learning opportunities from across their places of employment. This finding highlighted a lack of coordination and integration across these campuses, which indicated large gaps in the overall California community college system. When individual campuses did not take ownership of onboarding new counseling faculty, they created unnecessary challenges that impacted counseling faculty's ability to effectively work with their students. In particular, the campuses that unintentionally, or perhaps intentionally, provided no formal onboarding were still able to provide counseling services because counseling faculty sought their own onboarding and mentoring support, be it

from other colleges where they are employed or through their own resilience in navigating complex systems without official guidance. A reimagined onboarding process should have fostered better connections and consistency across these varied environments for the betterment of both counseling faculty and the students they serve.

Additionally, the finding that faculty sought out their own mentors while navigating their career development indicated a potential gap in institutional support at the exosystem level. As with onboarding opportunities, the interviewees were receptive and appreciative of mentoring opportunities. While they were willing to seek out their own mentors, the data suggested that when institutions provide newly hired professionals with official mentors and encourage connections between colleagues that can develop into unofficial mentoring, newly hired counseling faculty felt more supported in their work with students and in their understanding of the districts in which they work. Mentoring relationships had lasting effects on personal and professional trajectories, with many participants highlighting that mentors assisted them during initial onboarding and years later. Therefore, integrated, dual-mentoring avenues created a holistic support system, enabling counseling faculty to better understand their roles in the district and statewide initiatives that promote student success. As counseling faculty learned to better navigate the larger systems that impact their work, they became more equipped to serve the diverse student populations within the community college system.

Finally, interviewees expressed that exosystem influences shaped their interactions with students, but they did not communicate confidence in their ability to communicate back to these larger systems. One of the key strengths of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory was its highlighting of the bidirectional impact and influence between an individual and their environmental nested

systems. This aspect of the theory underscored how individuals are affected by and actively shape their environments. In the context of counseling faculty, this meant that their actions and decisions could influence the dynamics of their immediate workplace, professional development settings, and broader organizational policies, just as these environments influenced them. At a time when the state was calling on individual community college districts to work toward equity goals as outlined by the *Vision for Success*, the perspectives and experiences of counseling faculty needed to be better examined at the district level so that practitioner expertise informs exosystem-level policies (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017).

Centering Counseling Faculty Within an Ecological Framework

By centering the experiences of counseling faculty within an ecological framework, this study intentionally sought a more nuanced understanding of their onboarding and mentoring experiences. The findings indicated that these processes were not just about acquiring knowledge or skills but also about navigating complex social and organizational landscapes. Given their proximity to students and their agency as faculty, this study validated that counseling faculty members' perspectives deserve to be centered in discussions of campus development and student success. By focusing on their lived experiences, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory provided valuable insights into how counseling faculty adapted and responded to their environments. This understanding was essential for developing recommendations for more effective and supportive onboarding and mentoring programs that acknowledge and address the dynamic interplay between counseling faculty and their ecological systems.

Moreover, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory emphasized the individual's perceived lived experience within their ecological system. This perspective aided in moving beyond merely

describing the environments and interactions of counseling faculty. Instead, it delved into a deeper understanding of how they perceived and navigated their professional landscape at various levels of interaction. This focus on lived experience was crucial for comprehending counseling faculty's range of strategies and skills. Individual adaptive strategies of counseling faculty often developed in response to the challenges and opportunities they encountered in various sub-systems, particularly during onboarding and mentoring processes. In this study, participants consistently demonstrated their motivation to figure out how to navigate complex systems to adequately serve their students. The findings indicated that these adaptive strategies employed by counseling faculty often filled institutional gaps in the onboarding and mentoring process.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this exploratory study was to better understand the ways that community college counseling faculty experienced the onboarding and mentoring opportunities that shaped their development in the early years of their profession. Community college counseling faculty featured in the study and the services they provided were uniquely intertwined with the academic, career, and personal success of the students they work with. The responsibilities of counseling faculty required various levels of engagement at the college, as their work included one-on-one services to students, larger support service efforts, campuswide programming and development, and the facilitation of policies dictated by statewide initiatives. As a result of this multi-leveled work, counselors were working within systems to provide layered support to students across campus. Despite their complex roles and responsibilities and their impact on student development, there has been a lack of empirical data related to counseling faculty experiences. This study provided essential data for community college leaders who wish to best support diverse community college students by equipping their campuses with intentionally supported counseling faculty.

This study centered on the personal narratives of five counseling faculty who had navigated the complex community college system to secure careers as tenured/tenure-track counseling faculty. Despite each of the participants coming from different campuses in which they were onboarded as counseling faculty, many similarities in their experiences provided context that was required to fully understand the challenges that new counselors faced when beginning their careers as adjunct faculty. In addition to highlighting challenges, the participants

also provided evidence of best practices that could be used to support the onboarding and mentoring of counseling faculty, which ultimately would lead to greater support available to diverse student populations across the California community college system. Chapter 4 presented findings related to the study's overarching research question as well as the first sub-question, by examining both challenges and best practices counseling faculty identified in their own onboarding and mentoring experiences. This final chapter first provides recommendations for future research, then addresses the second sub-question to answer how an ecological framework may be utilized to assist in identifying recommendations on what supports are necessary for counseling faculty for institutions to be successful in their mission to support diverse students.

Recommendations

In centering the narratives of the counseling faculty as practitioner experts in their field, this chapter makes connections between implications and recommendations to encourage institutional leaders and policymakers to reimagine the factors that influence the onboarding and mentoring practices of counseling faculty. Recommendations for research and policy are presented and highlight systemic issues that were illuminated by the study's narratives.

Recommendations for Research

This exploratory study provided essential data for a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities, as well as the challenges, faced by community college counselors in California. The study focused on counseling faculty who were employed as tenured or tenure-track faculty members while data collection took place. To ensure participants had recent memories of their onboarding and mentoring experiences, the study intentionally examined participants who had between 5 and 7 years of experience in the field. As a result, there could be additional

opportunities for scholars to deepen empirical knowledge of the complexity of the roles counseling faculty play within the California community college system by looking at the experiences of counseling faculty with varied years of experience in the field. Counseling faculty who are in the first years of their career and those who are nearing the end of their careers may have varied contexts in which they make meaning of their onboarding and mentoring experiences. As Tierney and Rhoads (1993) described, faculty socialization and onboarding are ongoing processes that span a faculty member's career. Similarly, counseling faculty continue to learn and adapt throughout their careers. As such, given the lack of research related to counseling faculty in California, additional studies that document perspectives of current counseling faculty with ranging years of experience in the field are needed to develop a documented understanding of the challenges counseling faculty face.

The counseling faculty in this study demonstrated their ability to utilize opportunities and resources to successfully develop their ability to serve students through onboarding and mentoring. While not all counseling faculty may share the same goal of wanting to secure a full-time, tenure-track position, it is noteworthy that the study centered experiences of five individuals who have all met a level of success in their career that may inform their responses to questions about their onboarding. Future research could center on adjunct faculty who have attempted to secure full-time tenure-track roles but have been unsuccessful or individuals who were hired as adjunct counseling faculty but decided to leave the community college faculty profession. Hearing from individuals who may have left the profession may provide an interesting context to the challenges counseling faculty face. These experiences may differ greatly from those highlighted in this study and may provide community college leaders with

important perspectives while making decisions about how to best support new counseling faculty.

Ultimately, considering the immense size of the California community college system, extensive research is still required to better understand the complex role of a counseling faculty member. In other systems of higher education in the United States, academic counselors have not been designated as faculty members. Therefore, California counseling faculty have been uniquely placed in their proximity to the experiences of community college students and their agency in the community college system as faculty members who participate in shared governance at the college. Despite this unique vantage point that counseling faculty have within their colleges, there has been prominent gaps in current research on the ways counseling faculty could be best utilized to support students across the state. Therefore, additional qualitative research should be done to look at the impact of counseling services from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders including those of current students, administrators, teaching faculty, and even community college alumni. By better understanding the roles that counseling faculty play in the lives of their students and the functions of the community college system, further questions related to the onboarding and mentoring needs of counseling faculty can be explored to make sure newly hired faculty are supported while transitioning into their roles.

Recommendations for Policy

As outlined in Chapter 4, the counseling faculty participants were able to identify and articulate clear recommendations for the ways they could be better supported through effective onboarding and mentoring. At the microsystemic level, participants advised local leaders to prioritize learning opportunities that balanced technical training and cultural competency to

equip new counselors with the practical skills needed to effectively work with students from diverse populations. At the mesosystemic level, participants articulated the importance of both official and unofficial mentors and recommended that onboarding should intentionally incorporate integrated mentoring opportunities that allow new counselors to learn from one another. Counseling faculty felt that access to mentorship early on in their careers allowed them to feel more confident in their roles, especially as it related to meeting the needs of the students they worked with. Finally, the recommendations from participants for exosystemic level were twofold. First, they recommended all districts develop a baseline onboarding curriculum to make sure that all new counseling faculty were provided some guidance on local policies before seeing students. Second, the participants recommended that onboarding be facilitated in ways that demonstrated an institutional awareness that new professionals are often navigating multiple campuses simultaneously. This would mean that onboarding would take place using flexible formats and at times when newly hired faculty are paid to go through the set curriculum designed by each district. These district-level best practices would have demonstrated an alignment between an institution's support of diverse student populations by prioritizing the onboarding needs of the counseling faculty who are the front line of student services.

While participant narratives from this study provided recommendations for ways that onboarding and mentoring can be better designed through micro-, meso-, and exosystem level policies and practices, the data pointed to the necessity of counseling faculty to fill in gaps related to their onboarding at these levels because of their desire to serve students well. This demonstrated their understanding that when they felt confident in their work, they could better support the students they saw. Using an ecological framework, it was evident that in levels that

counseling faculty had more direct influence, they were better equipped to fill gaps in their onboarding using self-initiated strategies to better navigate the community college system. At higher ecological levels in which the counseling faculty had less influence, however, there grew a larger need for institutional policies and practices to have been evaluated to better support the needs of counseling faculty. Unlike the counseling faculty's demonstrated adaptiveness in this study, there was little evidence of adaptiveness of the local policies and practices that influence counseling faculty and the students they served. Going forward, before institutional leaders set lofty student success goals, they must evaluate the mission of their colleges and ensure that there is alignment between their goals and their support of counseling faculty. If district-level leaders are serious about student success, there must be robust and comprehensive onboarding for counseling faculty. Empowering counseling faculty at multiple levels provides opportunities for students to get the support they need while achieving their goals. This requires support at higher levels including the exo and macro levels. Celina spoke on exosystem level influences while describing how the values of community college institutions could be seen in their local support for counseling and student services.

I think it's directly connected. . . . So, I think it's like anything . . . tell me what you spend your money on and I'll tell you what you value. So if the counseling department is supported and is strong and robust, I feel like it's a good indication that the college really cares about the students holistically and cares about their social-emotional development in addition to their academics. I feel like at colleges where counseling is minimized, set to the side, [and the counseling department] doesn't really have a voice, or just very minuscule at some colleges, it tells me personally that they don't really care about their

students in that way. And it could be misguided. or it could just be like they just don't actually care, but I feel like that's a big correlation.

Additionally, at the macrolevel, the data supported that the community college system needed to demonstrate its understanding of the weight that counseling faculty carried across the community college system. The statewide, macrolevel, goal of supporting diverse student populations as outlined in the *Vision for Success*, should have been evident in the state's support of counseling faculty (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2017). Michelle spoke about the ways she thought the system could have demonstrated this macrolevel policy support of students through tangible practices like promoting the hiring of counseling faculty and other mental health professionals across the system.

I think [districts] demonstrate their understanding of student needs by putting their money where their mouth is- based on when they're doing faculty [hiring] prioritization, how many counselors are they bringing in? . . . It's interesting because teaching faculty spend the most time with students, but we find that students are the most open with counselors who they spend milliseconds with comparatively, but we're able to uncover so much. And so we are really trying to make all these connections with students. Our role is really to make educational plans, but we're doing so much more than that because we're like, okay, we just have Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and we're trying to make sure all of these things are being met, because in order for students to be successful, their basic needs have to be accounted for. And oftentimes there's not. And so I would say [the way they demonstrate support to students is by] providing support for counselors and providing more mental health professionals.

Michelle's reflection highlighted that while individual counselors are prepared to meet the needs of diverse student populations, the experiences of students were directly impacted by decisions made at higher policy levels in the district. Just as the resolution from the Academic Senate for California Community College (2021) acknowledged the essential roles that counseling faculty play in student success, statewide policymakers needed to be direct in their acknowledgment and financial support of counseling services as a tool for achieving student equity in the community college system. By allocating resources to hire, onboard, and mentor counseling faculty who were intentionally supported by their institutions, both district and state-level leaders could have taken actionable steps and the exo- and micro- levels to provide community college students with the support systems needed to be successful.

Finally, the ecological framework utilized in this study allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the ways counseling faculty could and should have been supported, especially in their early years of development. This study indicated that the mental focus of newly hired counseling faculty during the onboarding process was dedicated almost exclusively to micro and meso level interactions on campus. Additionally, even the more experienced counseling faculty featured in this study expressed a disconnect between their work with students and the exo and macro level policies that influence their jobs. By conceptualizing the community college system using an ecological framework that centered on counseling faculty, it was evident that the community college system was not holistically functioning in ways that allowed for counselors to best support their students within an ecologically balanced an environment. In order for the system to have operated at its best, the work being done at the various levels should have been sustainable and mutually inclusive of all stakeholders. Since each level of the ecosystem had

impact on the counseling faculty, there should have been opportunities for feedback loops at all levels to ensure that development of policies at the even the exo and macro levels could be both student centered, and faculty informed. There could be vitality in this ecosystem if all levels worked together intentionally. In a fully functioning ecosystem that acknowledged the utility of counseling faculty in supporting diverse students, individual counseling faculty would not have been taking so much time to work through lower-level gaps in order to support their students. If these factors were removed, counseling faculty could contribute more broadly to higher level feedback if provided the opportunity. The data from this study indicated that there was a trickle-down effect from higher ecological levels rather than a system in which lower levels were able to connect back to higher levels of influence. This study indicated that the ownness for change should not have been for individual faculty members to adapt to the system, but for the larger systems to have acknowledged and improved to better meet the needs of the collective individual practitioners. This ecological evaluation indicated that counseling faculty perspectives deserved to be centered in conversation about the ways the California community college system could take actionable steps towards meeting its goals of supporting its students.

Conclusion

The California community college system is one of the largest and most influential systems within higher education in the United States. In combining the outreach of the 116 campuses with the diversity of experiences that are found across the state of California, community colleges play a unique role in advancing the academic, professional, and personal lives of those often marginalized in higher education institutions. As such, community colleges advance equity and social justice outcomes while paving the way for a future where California's

workforce mirrors the diversity of the communities across the state. The system has a responsibility to adapt to the needs of the 1.8 million students who actively choose self-development through community college education. Supporting this many students, all of whom come with their own intersecting identities, requires that bold state-wide policies be made that look to support students at individual levels. Participants in this study demonstrated that counseling faculty have the expertise, passion, and care to be an essential component of meeting the needs of individual students who are navigating the complex ecologies that make up public higher education. The participants made clear their commitment to student success, and even gratitude for the ability to do transformational work with students, but also provided an important context that researchers and practitioners alike must acknowledge if California is to move the needle on closing equity gaps. As a counseling faculty turned research practitioner, I will conclude this dissertation with my reflection as both a product of the community college system and a fierce advocate for the life-changing influence that counseling faculty have the potential for while working with their students.

As a community college alumnus, I have felt the impact of the community college system in my own life. After finishing high school, I did not apply to any colleges or universities. Instead, I attended a local community college in southern California. At this campus, I sought out counselors who helped me understand the requirements I needed to complete to transfer to another university. While I did work several jobs while going to school, my biggest priority at the time was my academics. I successfully transferred in two years from my community college to a university and received my Bachelor's in English Literature. My goal was to be a high school or community college English professor, so after I received my bachelor's degree, I was

ecstatic to be offered the opportunity to work as an in-class tutor within the same English department I attended as a community college student. In this role, I would work closely with students enrolled in writing and reading classes to help them refine their composition skills. For two years, I enjoyed working in the classroom and loved that I got the opportunity to work with students one-on-one to discuss their writing. In one of the semesters, however, I worked in an accelerated English course that met more frequently than most courses and allowed students to move through their English requirements at the college in less time. The course was rigorous and time-consuming for students. Near the end of the semester, I remember having a meeting with one of the students who had been working incredibly hard in the class and was well on her way to pass the course. Despite her success in the class, she told me during our meeting that she needed to drop the class, with only a few more weeks left in the semester. I was shocked and questioned her as to why she would consider this after doing so much work in the course. Without knowing her story, I encouraged her to consider pushing through.

The student graciously took the time to explain her situation to me. She was a single mother, and her current financial situation made it so that if she did not pick up more hours at work, she would not be able to provide for her son. She felt she no longer had the option to prioritize school given the intensity of the accelerated course and its impact on her ability to maintain hours at her job. At this moment, I was hit with my privilege as someone who never had to make this kind of decision in my academic journey, and I also was left with a feeling of helplessness because I did not know how to assist her. Despite her talents in the class, her needs exceeded those of individual conversations about her ability to write an essay. This conversation changed the trajectory of my career. As a young professional, I was reaffirmed that I wanted to

stay working with students at the community college level and I better understood that student success was not simply a measure of academic capability. Even then, I wanted to find ways that I could better conceptualize the ecological factors that contributed to students' lived experiences on our campuses. Even more, I wanted to play an active role in supporting individual student success. That same week that I talked to the student, I started looking at other opportunities on the campus that would position me to work closely with students in academic settings while also equipping me with the skills needed more holistically support students on their journeys. My research led me to apply to and complete a graduate program in educational counseling which allowed me to begin working as a counseling faculty member.

I was incredibly fortunate that when I transitioned into counseling, I was hired at two campuses that provided incredible training opportunities. I was exposed to unofficial and official mentors who guided me, and I was brought in with cohorts of other new counselors who would serve as peer support. Many of these colleagues, friends, and mentors who helped me in my development are still in my corner today. Their support allowed me to feel more confident in my role, which carried over into my work with students. With intentional onboarding, I was able to learn the best practices of counseling and develop my knowledge of the profession. In working at various campuses, however, I learned quickly that most of my colleagues did not have a similar experience to mine. I often heard about the lack of support they received at previous campuses and the impact that this stress caused them. Some colleagues who I started working with in my early years of counseling decided to pursue other careers. Others, stuck with the profession but took time to feel confident in their roles. Collectively, those of us who started counseling at the same time agreed that the first few years of juggling multiple campuses and learning the ins and

outs of counseling at the community college level were grueling. We loved our jobs but felt there was a better way to have gone through the process.

After securing a tenure-track counseling faculty position, I made it my priority to make sure that newly hired counselors in my area would receive the same level of care that I experienced when I started. I took it upon myself to take time out of my schedule to get to know new counselors and to better understand their needs so that I could assist in creating and facilitating training to help them onboard into the department. I would ask them about their goals and introduce them to other counselors to make sure they had peers and mentors who could help them develop into the counselors they aspired to be one day. I encouraged new counselors that the stress they felt while starting would not last forever, and that their students would be incredibly lucky to have them in their support network. I consider myself incredibly fortunate to get personal and professional gratification for the work I do. Like my colleagues, I love the community college system and know the value it has in my students' lives. My passion for helping new counselors comes from the gratitude that I have for being paid to be in the role that I am in. I am inspired by counseling faculty who willingly take on the mental and emotional weight of the counseling profession. We do it because we love the work. Still, I believe we also deserve the support necessary to be successful in this work.

The dissertation process reaffirmed my commitment to advocating for the work that counseling faculty do across our state. The level of our impact is not reflected in the existing research or in the policies that enable ongoing challenges for our counseling faculty. While some campuses have achieved adequate local support for onboarding and mentoring counseling faculty, this is not a widespread, consistent reality at most of our campuses. This study validated

that counseling faculty deserve to be centered while reflecting on topics of student success. Support of counseling faculty at all levels of an ecological framework is a prerequisite to social justice outcomes in higher education. Counseling faculty need to be equipped to operate within ecological systems, and more so, be empowered to communicate back to these systems that directly and indirectly impact counselor and student development. California's macro-level equity goals are an important message to the United States that we believe all students can be successful. To make this a reality, though, educational leaders need to learn from the practitioners who have committed themselves to partnering with students while helping them navigate the complexities of higher education. Academia and leadership in the state of California need to commit to developing empirical research on counseling faculty experiences so that system-wide goals are the result of bilateral communication between practitioners and policy.

To newly hired counseling faculty whose experiences may resemble those of the participants featured in this study, know that you are not alone in this journey. Hold onto the sensation of excitement you felt when you first realized that your hard work paid off and that you had been chosen to step into the role of counseling faculty. You undoubtedly bring many unique, student-centered, irreplicable strengths to your campuses. While there may be times when the complexity of your role may feel overwhelming, remind yourself that, like your students, you may be up against a system of education that is in desperate need of change. Seek out mentors and peers whom you can trust to lean on during times of self-doubt. Know that you deserve to feel supported in your development. Advocate for yourself, even in moments you may feel disconnected from your schools of employment, especially when your voice is needed to speak up on behalf of the students you want to help. Our community colleges cannot thrive without you

and your gifts. The first few years of your counseling faculty journey may have challenges but know that feelings of overwhelm and insecurity will likely not last forever. Prioritize your mental health, just as you would encourage your students to do the same. Most importantly, when you feel you finally have the tools and support you need to thrive in your role, remember to actively guide and mentor new professionals who come up behind you so that we are collectively taking steps to improve our work environments. Always strive to be the type of support you needed when you began your journey.

In closing, I pay respect to the counseling faculty across California whose commitment to service comes from a genuine place of care and love for students. I say thank you to those who take the time to welcome in and mentor new generations of professionals who will continue to fight injustice in the world by supporting students who will go on to be the change our society needs. I acknowledge the unpaid labor that current models of education rely on, for faculty, often go above and beyond their contractual duties because of their desire to serve students and the communities in which they work. Finally, I thank the participants of my study, who graciously partnered with me in this work to shine a light on both the beauty and challenges that exist in this profession. I hope that this dissertation is the beginning of my ongoing commitment to honor and elevate the voices of counseling faculty whose care for students deserves to be valued within our society.

APPENDIX

Interview Protocol

R1- What policies and practices exist, from the counseling faculty perspective, that effectively support the onboarding and mentoring of counseling faculty?

R2- How can an ecological framework assist in identifying recommendations on what supports for counseling faculty are necessary for institutions to be successful in their mission to support diverse students?

Research Question	Coding Theme	Interview Question
R1, R2	Microsystem Level	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Describe your role as a California community college counseling faculty member.2. What experiences prepared you for your first job as a counseling faculty member and how do those experiences contribute your work with community college students?3. When you began your career, what opportunities did you have access to within your place(s) of work that helped you gain the skills you needed to work effectively with students?
R1, R2	Mesosystem Level	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. In addition to supporting your students during one on one counseling services, what types of interactions with other offices on campus or resources from outside of your campus were required to effectively perform your role as a counseling faculty member?5. Were there any professional development opportunities outside your place of work that you remember utilizing to help you transition into your role as a counselor as it relates to working with offices outside of the counseling

Research Question	Coding Theme	Interview Question
		department?
R1, R2	Exosystem Level	<p>6. When reflecting on the first few years of being a counseling faculty member, what opportunities were available to you in gaining mentorship as it related to navigating the complexity of your new role?</p> <p>7. In what ways do you see your role being impacted by influences outside of your college? This could include things like statewide initiatives, outside grants being utilized at your college, or legislation that has influences on your work.</p> <p>8. What would you consider to be essential competencies of counseling faculty in working with community college students from diverse backgrounds?</p> <p>9. Do you feel you have opportunities to provide feedback and advocacy on behalf of students and counselors back to these larger systems that impact your role as a counseling faculty?</p>
R2	Holistic counseling services and continuum of onboarding support	<p>10. When reflecting on the roles and responsibilities of counseling faculty (see resource describing typical responsibilities), are there areas that are harder to prioritize?</p> <p>11. In what ways do you think community colleges demonstrate their understanding of student needs based their support of counseling faculty and their services?</p>
R1, R2	Best Practices/ Recommendations	<p>12. Now that you are a full time counseling faculty member, how does your own onboarding and mentoring experience shape the way you work with new counseling faculty?</p> <p>13. What initiatives or programs exist at your current workplace that promote onboarding and mentoring of new counseling faculty at</p>

Research Question	Coding Theme	Interview Question
		your current workplace?
		14. What barriers exist at your current workplace that contribute to challenges in providing onboarding and mentoring to new counseling faculty?
		15. Given the multiple responsibilities that counseling faculty have in supporting diverse student populations, what would you recommend as best practices for better preparing new counseling faculty to be effective while beginning their careers? a. What topics or competencies do you think require more attention than what are currently given?

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