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Finding the Right Guide to Successful Academic Pathways: The Significance of the

Academic Advisors and the Completion Rate Success of Students within the

California Community College Guided Pathways Program

A Dissertation Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree
Doctor of Public Administration

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This dissertation written by

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has been approved by the

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perspectives of academic advisors who are servicing the needs of students within the California community colleges participating in the Guided Pathways initiative. In addition, the study sought to provide a detailed understanding of the perceptions of (a) the academic advisor's role in the community college meeting the goals outlined by the California Guided Pathways initiative and (b) the community college's role in affecting the success rate of students enrolled in the Guided Pathways-based programs. For this study's theoretical framework, the researcher looked at human relations and classical organizational theories, tying in how behavior outcomes are connected to one's relationship with perceived leaders and the environment. The researcher interviewed 12 academic advisors from two California Guided Pathways Project institutions. Through the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) method, the researcher identified six themes that have successfully impacted academic advisors' attempts to guide students within the Guided Pathways Project. This research found that the lack of an effective student onboarding method harmed the success of the Guided Pathways program as well as how the indecisiveness/unpreparedness of students contributed to higher caseloads for academic advisors. As the California community college system is about to embark on its Guided Pathways 2.0 initiative, it would be beneficial to review these findings as they are still evident.

Keywords: academic advisor, onboarding, caseloads, community college

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DEDICATION

This journey is dedicated to those loved ones who are no longer with me but will always hold a place in my heart. This journey is dedicated to my Grandma Guerrero, who always encouraged my academic success, and my Grandpa Guerrero, who taught me the importance of hard work. In addition, this journey is dedicated to my Grandma Larremore, who taught me that family does not necessarily mean one is related by blood or skin color.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

Each year millions of young adults are faced with the uncertainty of what educational avenue they want to engage in after high school. Community colleges, which offer an open-door admission policy and an inexpensive higher education alternative to nonprofit public and private universities and for-profit 4-year institutions, often become attractive to diverse student populations (Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2015). Often unguided, these young adults enroll at local community colleges and begin taking courses without truly understanding how to adequately select the proper coursework for career paths. These actions can delay the process for those wishing to transfer to 4-year higher education institutions to earn a bachelor's degree once they finish community college. According to Hubert (2016), typical community college students are often economically disadvantaged and unprepared for the college experience, demonstrating the need for clear guidance and structure. Many college students drop out within their first academic year without proper guidance. Continuing students often resort to floating within the community college system on average for 6 years, either because of maintaining only part-time status (i.e., six units per semester), noncompletion of courses, or taking extra courses that do not directly contribute to their degree program.

According to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (n.d.-d), during the 2017–2018 academic year, the largest demographic of community college students in terms of the unit load of credit awarded courses were students who took 3.0–5.9 units of credit in both the fall and spring semesters. During the fall 2017 semester, those within this group represented 27.06% of the overall state's community college

student population, and for the spring 2018 semester, the same group's representation

increased to 27.84% (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-d). This

trend continued in the 2018–2019 academic year (intersessions excluded) with the same

students being the most significant demographic (California Community Colleges

Chancellor's Office, n.d.-d). In addition, state statistics demonstrated slight increases in

both the fall and spring main semesters with this group accounting for 27.31% in the fall

and 28.46% in the spring semester, indicating the continual trend of most community

college students attending part-time instead of transitioning to full-time enrollment status,

which is the ideal goal for the California community college system.

To promote student success and avoid the delays caused by students attending

community college part-time instead of full-time, the California Community Colleges

Chancellor's Office (n.d.-d) has adopted the Guided Pathways initiative. Guided

Pathways programs have rapidly emerged among community colleges throughout the

United States to assist student success and transfer rates. According to Shepherd (2018),

within Guided Pathways if college students are provided with a clear pathway to either a

certificate or degree, a higher rate of success for the students will occur regardless of

common disadvantages such as their socioeconomic status, need for coemployment while

attending school, or age.

The Center for Community College Student Engagement (2018) explains that

with the Guided Pathways approach being implemented at community colleges

throughout the country, the role of the academic advisor becomes more critical to the

success of the student, because advising is one of the two main areas of the program's

structure. Dealing with the changing landscape that the Guided Pathways program brings

to community colleges, academic advisors are required "to have broader skill sets and increase their engagement levels with their students" (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2018, p. 3). Results from a survey conducted across 297 community colleges determined that over two thirds of respondents who were returning students had credited their engagement with their academic advisor as very important more consistently than any other student service provided in their decision to return to college (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2018).

Through the collaboration of the Community College Research Center (CCRC) and the American Association of Community Colleges, four primary areas of practice of the Guided Pathways initiative are (a) mapping pathways to student end goals, (b) helping students choose and enter a program pathway, (c) keeping students on a path, and (d) ensuring the students are learning (Bailey, 2017). These main points outlined by the CCRC and American Association of Community Colleges of the Guided Pathways have led to the "Four Pillars of Pathways," which consist of (a) creating clear curricular pathways to employment and further education, (b) helping students choose and enter their pathway intake, (c) helping students stay on their path, and (d) ensuring that learning is happening with intentional outcomes (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-d).

District XYZ (anonymized) consists of multiple community college campuses. These community colleges aim to promote diversity and equal educational opportunity to over 43,000 Southern California students. To assist students with socioeconomic disadvantages in completing an associate's degree, transferring to a 4-year academic institution with their general education finished, or earning a professional certificate, the

District XYZ has designed priority registration programs primarily for the 18-24 age group. As of 2019, District XYZ has the distinction of having two of its colleges (Institution A and Institution B) selected by the California Guided Pathways Institute from among the 20 community colleges statewide from the California Guided Pathways Project.

The researcher's interest in this topic is his firsthand experience with the community college education system (i.e., faculty, staff, and administration), students, family members, and other community members through troubleshooting more than 150 issues that came into his institution daily and more than doubled the average incidents during peak times during the academic year. These groups directly affect the Guided Pathways program's design and the college student's engagement level with the college itself and deal with multiple associated programs offered at the community college level. In addition, 4 years before the researcher's current employment with his institution, the researcher served as a volunteer academic advisor for his agency's employees and their families, which included reviewing employee high school and college transcripts and providing academic plans for transferrable classes from local California community colleges for their desired major at their choice 4-year institution.

Over the last 5 years, the researcher has seen firsthand how Guided Pathways programs have been implemented to help reach the goals set not only by District XYZ but also established by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office to improve student success rates as the researcher served on his institution's Guided Pathways Committee before the committee's current hiatus. The researcher also has previous experience with his institution's now-defunct College Readiness Workgroup

and Transfer Pathways Workgroup, both predecessors to his institution's Guided Pathways Committee.

Student success at the community college level has long been attributed to the established relationship with academic advisors (O'Banion, 1972, 2017). According to O'Banion (1972), the academic advisor's primary role in community colleges is to assist students in the appropriate student program, increasing their chances of success; students without guidance often struggle to survive and become victims within the educational process. With the recent community college institutions' adoption of the Guided Pathways programs, O'Banion (2017) posited that nothing has changed; as the role of academic advisors changes to meet the demand, the primary function of guidance in the right direction has not changed concerning student success.

Increasing workloads for academic advisors are not the only problems academic advisors deal with; V. Gordon et al. (2008) argued that academic advisors at the community college level

> are continuously faced with continuously a common challenge of meeting a diverse group of students that other four-year universities and colleges do not typically deal with, as community colleges students often come with a variety of challenges that can be academically, financially, and personally based. (p. 446)

Along with this diversity of student-related challenges, one of the more challenging issues that community college academic advisors are regularly confronted with is a student population with dramatically varying educational and career-related goals (V. Gordon et al., 2008). More importantly, V. Gordon et al. (2008) argued that community college academic advisors are tasked with assisting students through the task of changing

their mindset to one in which time allocation of academics becomes a priority because allocating time for schoolwork is often difficult for first-generation college students or for those students attending college with little time because of being married and other family-related commitments.

Statement of the Research Problem

A community college degree requiring approximately 2 years to complete has a high dropout rate and an extended timeframe of up to 6 years. For the 2018–2019 academic year, only an estimated 45.8% of California community students were on pace to complete the minimum required 60-unit graduation requirement within the 2- to 3-year range while the majority (~54.2%) of students were on pace to complete the same requirement within the 4- to 6-year range (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-b). As noted by W. Isaac (personal communication, March 11, 2019), regardless of recent efforts made by both the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and the California Community Colleges Board of Governors to consistently provide the necessary resources for both prospective and current community college students within the 18-24 age demographic (i.e., traditional students) to complete their first 2 years of college within the actual 2-year timeframe, most students still fall within the 4-6-year timeframe.

Although there has been some noticeable improvement with results in some student demographical areas, the overall results have not been significant concerning the efforts made (W. Isaac, personal communication, March 11, 2019). One of the more recent efforts made by California's community college's governing bodies is adopting the Guided Pathways initiative. However, even with student assistance programs such as

Guided Pathways aimed to maximize the number of community college students completing their courses in 2 years. The majority of this demographic of community students attends only part-time and takes approximately 6 years to complete their community college education, and many others drop out along the way (W. Isaac, personal communication, March 11, 2019).

In various studies, an academic advisor's role has been noted as a valued asset toward promoting a community college student's success, especially with the Guided Pathways initiative. According to the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2018), as many community colleges are transforming their institutions with the ideals of the Guided Pathways, the academic advisor's role in helping students choose the appropriate student program becomes more crucial. Furthermore, to ensure student success at the community college level with the implementation of the Guided Pathways ideology, the role of academic advisors must evolve and expand.

Based on recent data collected for the 2018 Survey of Entering Student Engagement, however, the presence of academic advisors seems still low because the data indicated that only approximately 42% of all students entering California community colleges participating in the Guided Pathways initiative were not required to meet with an academic advisor (Survey of Entering Student Engagement, 2019). According to the same report, over 34% (34.8% actual) of California community college students surveyed reported not meeting with an academic advisor during their first academic term. Additionally, 45.7% of the students surveyed concerning Guided Pathways had not discussed their chosen program's completion time, and 70.3% had not discussed the costs associated with completing their program. The data indicate that the traditional

demographic may struggle because of academic advisor-related issues, directly affecting

the student and the California community college's education system and partners to such

institutions and the surrounding community.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perspectives of

academic advisors who are servicing the needs of students within the California

community colleges participating in the Guided Pathways initiative. In addition, the

study sought to provide a detailed understanding of the perceptions of (a) the academic

advisor's role in the community college meeting the goals outlined by the California

Guided Pathways initiative and (b) the community college's role in affecting the success

rate of students enrolled in the Guided Pathways-based programs.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions for this study:

Primary Research Question: From an academic advisor's (i.e., counselor and educational

advisor) perspective, what role does the advisor play in California community colleges'

ability to meet the goals outlined by the California Guided Pathways initiative?

Secondary Research Question: From an academic advisor's perspective, what are the

critical issues California community colleges need to address to increase student success

in California Guided Pathways-based programs?

Significance of the Problem

The significance of the problem with lower rates of full-time enrollment within

community colleges, even with the California Guided Pathways program, negatively

affects traditional and nontraditional students because of incomplete degrees, wasted time

resources, and a failure to enter the workforce adequately prepared. In addition, community members are negatively impacted by a lack of prepared societal members, positively contributing to local communities. Finally, higher education stakeholders are negatively impacted by stagnant growth.

One of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office's efforts to help with the California Guided Pathways program's success was to roll out the College Promise ideology among its colleges. Under the College Promise ideology, community colleges partner with the state and local communities in a collaborative effort to help provide the opportunity to first-time college students to attend community colleges at minimal if any costs (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-a). Although the College Promise services might vary at each community college, most provide the transitioning high school graduate including Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students with priority registration and mandatory meetings with academic advisors to ensure that they are guided in the right direction of academic success with transfer/degree completion within 2 years.

The California College Promise Innovation Grant Program, which was established through the passing of AB 1741, awarded one-time funding of $15 million to 14 community college districts in an effort to either develop or expand on the partnerships with local K-12 school districts and community organizations with expectations of success similar to the Long Beach College Promise, which had been recognized nationally (Dorr, 2017). Even with the resources needed at their disposal, however, these traditional students continued to struggle without the proper academic guidance,

prolonging their community college experience and overall college experience for those with the goals of a 4-year higher education.

Research has indicated that individuals who earn at least an associate's degree or certificate from a California community college typically make approximately double their earnings within 3 years of completion (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-d). In addition, as indicated by the Foundation for California Community Colleges (n.d.-c), those individuals who seek occupations requiring associate's degrees, on average, earn $16,900 more in average wages than their high school-level counterparts. Furthermore, those who earned at least an associate's degree from California community colleges typically earned $400,000 more during their lifetime in wage earnings than those who only graduated high school (Community College League of California, 2018).

The Foundation for California Community Colleges (n.d.) specified that California community colleges are the largest workforce training provider in the state, especially within the safety services and medical industries. For example, for firefighters, law enforcement personnel, or emergency medical technicians training, California community colleges account for 80% of that state's overall training. In addition, California community colleges account for 70% of California nurses' education.

In addition, the low full-time status of community college students under the Guided Pathways initiative is found in the populations of both traditional and nontraditional community college students. Without the benefit of priority registration and other resources provided to students who are identified at an equity disadvantaged, these students are limited to enrolling in courses required to either graduate with an

associate's degree or certificate or potentially transfer to a 4-year institution to complete a bachelor's degree. For example, working-class traditional and nontraditional students who might already be limited to taking classes online through distance education programs or courses during evening hours are subject to a narrower selection of required college-level general education courses required for degree/certification completion or transfer courses such as English and mathematics.

Without getting the classes required to graduate or transfer, traditional and nontraditional students will start looking for alternative ways of ensuring their education within a timely matter, which adds to the problem's significance. Shepherd (2018) noted that for-profit colleges' recruitment threatens community college enrollment by targeting low-income and minority students, typically making up a significant number of the community college system's enrollment each year. According to Cotton (2017), approximately 30% of first-time higher education students in the United States in the first decade of the 21st century opted to choose a for-profit college for their academic journey.

For-profit colleges, the few that remain in the United States, threaten traditional general education courses and the vocational and technical courses and programs that community colleges offer. For example, Cotton (2017) noted that "55 percent of those who complete their education at for-profit colleges consists of certificate earners from vocation and technical based programs" (p. 59). Moreover, according to Cotton, "The majority of the students in these [certificate] programs are low-income black, Hispanic, and female students," who make up the majority of the community college student demographic (p. 59).

Within their study of low-income and minority youth, Holland and DeLuca (2016) documented how "over the last 15 years, there has been a drastic increase in enrollment from this demographic in for-profit trade schools" (p. 264). In addition, Holland and DeLuca noted that "nearly 90 percent of these low-income and minority students were required to take out student loans to pay for the significant difference in tuition and school-related fees" (p. 264) compared to community colleges that offered similar trade and technical programs.

Understanding the shortcoming with which most low-income and minority students are faced because of the lack of career or academics during high school, "for-profit trade and technical schools effectively market to these students, making the connection between education and work explicitly that previously was unidentified to these students" (Holland & DeLuca, 2016, p. 265). Furthermore, compared to similar community college technical and trade programs, Holland and DeLuca (2016) discovered that the success rates favored by for-profit technical and trade colleges were attributed to the multiple mandatory academic advisory sessions required by the for-profits.

If No Progression Is Met

California Community Colleges

The California Community college system represents the most extensive higher education system in the United States with over 2.1 million students within its 116 recognized colleges (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-a). The California community college system also represents the most significant source of higher education opportunities for Hispanic students in the nation, representing over a third of its student population. Therefore, continued student success within each of their

respective colleges is crucial for the system's longevity and provides opportunities for students to change the direction of their lives.

Recently, the low full-time status rates of the students within California Guided Pathways-driven programs can affect the California community colleges themselves, which received $150 million for Guided Pathways and the California Guided Pathways Project from the California Governor's 2017–2018 budget (Karau-Magnani, 2019). Local, state, and federal funding for community colleges comes from the government, nonprofit organizations, private contributors, and taxpayers. These parties desire some return on investment, thus wanting the community colleges to meet certain expectations and more favorable success ratings.

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (n.d.-c) has documented a correlation between student success and the return on investment for California taxpayers. For every $1 invested in a student who graduates from a California community college, California taxpayers receive $4.50 in return. However, if the California community college system's student success rates continue to fail to meet their investors' expectations (i.e., taxpayers), the system itself can be at risk of losing significant funding, directly affecting how this education system will operate in the future.

During an open forum, Riverside Community College District's Chancellor Dr. Wolde-Ab Isaac (personal communication, March 11, 2019) mentioned that community colleges must have the buy-in by their local community's fundraising efforts to raise funds through bonds. However, as noted by Isaac, local taxpayers are reluctant to vote in favor of bonds that will benefit local higher public education institutions if the purpose of

the community college is to ensure their students complete their studies within 2 years and either move onto 4-year institutions or enter the local workforce with the new skills obtained. In addition, according to Isaac, taxpayers expect to see some investment return, which comes at the cost of increasing taxes.

In 2020, for example, the Riverside Community College District proposed a $715 million college improvement called Measure A, which was put on the local ballot during the California primaries in March (Riverside Community College District, n.d.). According to the administration of Riverside County College District (n.d.), the funds raised through such bonds were to be used to meet the needs and demands of its students by improving its facilities and availability of necessary resources for academic success of three of the district's colleges. Had Measure A received the required 55% supermajority approval rate, the bond measure would have increased local homeowner's property taxes by an estimated tax rate of $0.02 per $100 of their property's assessed value; however, on March 3, 2020, the proposition came up notably short, garnering just 46.6% of the vote (Yarbrough, 2020).

On the other hand, during the same academic timeframe, those students who were on track to complete community college within the ideal 2 years by taking 15 or more units of credit courses per semester represented the second-smallest demographic in California. As statistically shown by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (n.d.-b), within the 2017–2018 academic year, this group of students accounted for 8.95% of the student population during the fall semester and 9.20% during the spring semester. Once again, during the 2018–2019 academic year, some progress was made in this demographic; however, such progress was insignificant because the demographic

continued to represent the second smallest group in terms of unit load with 9.45% during

the fall semester and 9.65% of the overall population during the spring semester

(California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-b).

Local Communities

Another group is affected by current low full-time status rates, with a low

completion rate of community college students in the surrounding community. Most

community colleges offer vocational training in welding, auto technology, and nursing on

top of transferrable associate's degrees and college certificate programs. As noted by

Milliron and de los Santos (2004), community colleges were credited as being the

primary source for certificated related programs, such as information technology, allied

health, financial and accounting services, and hazardous materials, which meet many of

the needs of the local community partners, thus establishing a long-term relationship that

will benefit both parties. The California community college system has been recognized

as the largest workforce training provider in the state and the nation.

According to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (n.d.-c),

studies have shown that when individuals graduate from a community college, their

chances of finding a job double compared to individuals who failed to complete their

high school education. In addition, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

(2013) occupations that require an associate's degree are projected to grow by

approximately 18% through 2022, which is considered a faster rate than the new job

growth for those with a bachelor's degree. Understanding this statistic's relevance can

help local communities with small and larger scale businesses that need skilled and

vocational workers and have trouble filling qualified and experienced job applicants within the local community pool base.

Also, the surrounding local communities suffer from a local consumer and tax perspective. As community college students earn their degrees and certificates and join the local workforce, the potential for those contributing a portion of their income back to local businesses and strengthening the local economy is favorable to all parties involved. In addition, local homeownership generates local property tax revenue, which can help future community college students fund local public K-12 education institutions that will act as feeder schools for prospective community college students.

Community College Support Staff

Finally, the significance of the problem with the low full-time status rates of community college students affects all public servants who are accountable for their success. Tinto (2006) argued a correlation between a college's ability to retain students and the stability of the higher education institution's ability to maintain a stable budget. Regardless of whether it is classified as staff, faculty, or management and administrators of the community colleges, each group suffers when the community college's expectations of student success rates fail to be met. Not only does loss of funding because of low student performance affect the likelihood of new opportunities within a community college, but it also could negatively affect the community college financially, resulting in the necessity of downsizing (i.e., job loss) or restructuring within the higher education intuition's overall organizational structure.

Definitions

Academic advisor(s). For this study, this term will be used to describe both community college academic counselors and community college educational advisors. Each provides academic-related services to prospective and current community college students' academic advice crucial to their success. Academic counselors are recognized as faculty within the California community college system and require a minimum of a master's degree. Educational advisors are recognized as classified staff within the California community college system and typically require no more than an associate's degree although a bachelor's degree is often desired. Advice ranges from the initial registration and onboarding process to course selection and coursework completion to complete an associate's degree, professional certificate, transfer requirements to a 4-year public or private higher education institution for those applicable and choosing a proper program within the Guided Pathways program.

Cafeteria approach. A long-time approach used within the California community college system. Students were given various courses and majors to choose from when planning their academic schedules. Consequently, with this approach, students self-guided themselves through their educational process instead of getting guidance from academic advisors, leading them to take an overabundance of courses unrelated to their selected major (if one had been chosen). The Guided Pathways approach was implemented to eliminate this outdated method.

California College Promise Grant. Formerly known as the Board of Governor's Fee Waiver, which provides free tuition and a reduction of other enrollment and student service-related fees for part-time and full-time California community college students

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based on financial need. Students do not need to be part of Institution A's or Institution B's promise program to qualify for this state grant. However, most participants in such programs are typically eligible as well.

California Guided Pathways Project. A student-centered approach aims to dramatically increase the number of students' community college credentials (i.e., degrees or certificates) within 2 years by narrowing the equity gaps. This academic succession-based project also seeks to minimize the number of excessive units taken by community college students, which tends to factor in students' ability to complete community college within the 2-year timeframe. Examples of such programs include the California College Promise and Student Success & Support Program (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2016).

Centralized advising centers. A centralized unit within the community offers academic advising and other support services to promote student success. Centers might be major-based, pathway-specific, or for general purposes. Typically, these centers have representatives from all three college staff levels, including classified, faculty, and administrative. Other commonly used names for centralized advising centers include engagement centers or "one-stop" shops.

Mapping. Refers to outlining California community college students' education pathway to their academic goal of achievement. For some students, this goal might be a certificate, associate's degree, certificate, associate degree-based, or any previous outcomes with the plan to transfer to a 4-year higher education institution to obtain a bachelor's degree.

Nontraditional student. Refers to community college students within California, ranging from 25 years or older. Both part-time and full-time students are included in this definition. This group often includes working-class students who take classes at night, on weekends, or online.

Promise program. Community college program developed by both Institution A and Institution B in which recent high school graduates in the surrounding community are promised priority registration, free tuition, and $250 book voucher per semester, school supplies, and other monetary and nonmonetary resources in exchange for the student's promise to complete 60 units of transferable college units within a 2-year timeframe. Institution B's version of the Promise program requires students to participate in the Summer Advantage program before attending the first fall semester. This specialty program covers all enrollment fees for the first year of college.

Retention. The purpose of this study refers to the ability of the community college to keep students (prospective students included) currently enrolled full-time at the college for consecutive semesters without a break of study, not counting the winter and summer intersessions. Community college students are not required to attend intersession to maintain their current student status at the community college.

Street-level bureaucracy. The concept originated by Michael Lipsky (2010) in which the impact of interpretation and final decision making of policies and guidelines in place within a public institution falls under the discretion of the public administrators (or public servants) who hold lower level or other nonmanagerial positions but are those individuals who deal with the public themselves daily.

Traditional student. Refers to community college students within California, ranging from 18 to 24 years old. Part-time and full-time students are included in this definition.

Unpreparedness rate. Refers to the rate at which incoming students at the community college level who are not self-sufficient in being able to select their course load or map out their goals and how those goals will be achieved regardless of whether the purpose is lifelong learning, degree, or certificate oriented, vocational training, or to transfer to a 4-year institution.

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Organization of the Study

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This study is organized into five chapters. In Chapter 1, readers were introduced to why this study was conducted with California community colleges and their students' current inability to succeed even with resources. In Chapter 2, readers are provided with a review of past relevant literature associated with the chosen research topic. Chapter 3 provides readers with the methodology used during the data-gathering process for this research paper, focusing on the steps taken to answer the two proposed research questions. In Chapter 4, readers are presented with the study results and what specific details require further investigation in the research matter. Finally, Chapter 5 represents the concluding section of this research study; it discusses and analyzes the results and provides future recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

History

Based on the 2010 Survey of Entering Student Engagement data, an estimated 66% of students who entered community colleges were found to be at least one learning course short of being academically prepared (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2012). Without the proper learning environment, one course could significantly detour students' learning process and first-year experience. Therefore, the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2012) identified what they referred to as the Promising Practices for Community College Student Success, which would assist community colleges in developing a culture to provide a learning environment from the initial engagement of the student until the student completes the transition to either graduation or transfers to a 4-year college.

Similar to the Guided Pathways initiative and its four key pillars of success, the Promising Practices for Community College Student Success is broken down into three groups of success practices, which are classified as (a) planning for success, (b) initiating success, and (c) sustaining success (Center for Community College Engage, 2012). The initiating success group is largely centered on the learning community's importance for success because this mindset is critical during the student's transition from high school to community college. In addition, understanding one's past can often predict one's future, which is why it is imperative for the community college to design proper programs that take into consideration assessments and past academic successes and failures and devise an appropriate plan for that first year experience for the student.

Even with student support mechanisms like the Promising Practices for Community College Student Success and Guided Pathways programs within community colleges, the problems with student engagement and guidance of students concerning their overall success continue to exist. According to a study conducted by Jenkins and Cho (2013), when dealing with community colleges, support mechanisms for students to be adequately prepared for programs of study, as well as support through the students' progressions through the program of study, the engagement level is relatively low. Thus, when a community college introduces more programs, students run the risk of failing to make the desired academic progress by the college.

Consequences of Lack of Guidance

Jenkins and Cho (2013) noted that the mere presence of the Guided Pathways program within the community college system is not enough to guarantee success. Although many community colleges they observed offered various academic programs, Jenkins and Cho found that the community colleges were not providing the necessary attention to their student body. Therefore, these unguided community college students, through their self-advising, tended to default to the general education program of study when the community college institutions were more interested in monitoring solely their students' enrollment in general courses rather than providing them guidance to an appropriate pathway. Consequently, students experienced more extended periods without the proper academic guidance, which further delayed their educational journey. At the same time, Jenkins and Cho found that students who were interviewed and identified that they were guided adequately to a well-defined pathway demonstrated a higher probability

of completing their courses and transferring to a 4-year institution to complete their academic journey.

As the nation has experienced increased access to higher education for disadvantaged individuals by implementing social equity and anti-discriminatory laws, the number of unprepared college students has increased (A. Taylor, 2015). In addition, community colleges have open enrollment to students of all learning levels. As a result, many are now faced with finding ways to support students typically placed in remedial courses or below in English, reading, and mathematics. Understanding the need to adapt to the student's needs, community colleges must take an integrated learning theory approach and structure a learning environment. This understanding has led to the necessary redevelopment of the school's curriculum, that is, the teaching styles and methods of the faculty and redesigning of the assessment testing standards to assist those incoming disadvantaged students who, in many cases, did not possess the expected learning outcomes during their primary and secondary education experience (A. Taylor, 2015).

Like Jenkins and Cho's (2013) perspective, Generals (2018) supported the idea that community college students without purpose or outcome are less successful in their academic journey because of a lack of guidance. Increasing the number of programs that a community college offers only helps put extra strain on students' ability to succeed, especially when they are not given the necessary advice and guidance to choose an appropriate educational game plan correctly. Instead, the community colleges' ability to garner the resources needed for their students to be successful is not enough because not being able to guide the students properly to those available resources can be considered

more negative than if the college never provided the help from the beginning. Additionally, community college resources are often limited because of funding, so unused resources can be considered negative, causing future resources not to be used to help others in need.

According to Generals (2018), "Too many high school students have fallen victim to learning environments that failed to push them to their full potential" (para. 2). For many years, the standard cafeteria model presented to community college students resulted in such victims. Generals proclaimed that the laissez-faire environment created by the cafeteria model approach caused community college institutions to paralyze their students and their ability to achieve their academic potential and success. Although modern technologies are available to help students match appropriate coursework to their placement level, technological advances do not necessarily replace the impact of the firsthand experience of students meeting with an academic advisor or academic counselor who can maximize their potential for success.

In a nationwide survey conducted with college students beginning their first-year college experience, approximately 40% of those surveyed were undecided about their major (O'Banion, 2017). According to O'Banion (2017), a nearly 40% scale could be underestimated based on the survey criteria. Understanding the significant uncertainty among first-year students about their academic journey only adds to why there needs to be an available support system consisting of educational advisors and academic counselors to help guide students in the right direction.

Need for Establishing a Learning Community

As a synthesis of the integrated learning theory approach, the Carroll Model of School Learning can be applied to any subject matter in the classroom and be used to learn (Carroll, 1963, 1989). Furthermore, the Carroll Model of School Learning indicates that learning is a function of time because learning occurs when the adequate amount of time needed to acquire knowledge or skills becomes associated with the task at hand (Carroll, 1963). Through his discoveries, Carroll (1989) realized that integrated learning is an ongoing process requiring those involved to continually reevaluate the learning environment and make necessary adjustments to benefit the students collectively.

Without understanding the organizational learning process of transitioning to the 2-year college system, the revolving door of attrition will not only continue to exist but also waste the potential of a significant number of community college students who might have succeeded had the proper foundation been set (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Based on Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) findings, there is a need for the establishment of clear guidelines, outlined by both the high schools and the community colleges that prospective students plan to attend, that will adequately propel transitioning students. Therefore, the overall learning process must be a community effort, including the educational institutions' actions and any other support system the prospective student relies on during time of need.

Benefits

Enhancing the student's integrated learning process will build the necessary academic and social systems to translate to the institution effectively (Duffy, 2002). Within his research study, Duffy (2002) noted that the education system had failed to

create an efficient program to assist high school students through their respective transitional periods into colleges and universities. Unlike most other studies in higher education that focused on disadvantaged students, Duffy argued that under the educational system in place at the time of his research, without the presence of an established uniformed program for all its students, the higher education institutions created a disadvantage for their students who were already making the effort to be successful in their academics.

Through dual enrollment opportunities, high school students can experience college life earlier, benefiting them when transitioning to full-time college (Duffy, 2002). Therefore, for the dual enrollment programs to be successful, continual improvement must be implemented so that the proper changes between the involved schools can make the required adjustments to the learning process. Unfortunately, barriers to such necessary progress and growth can occur because a groupthink mentality, which is resistant to change, is present within the institution's structure.

Deterrents

Janis (1982) defined groupthink as "when members of any small cohesive group tend to maintain esprit de corps (i.e., feeling of pride or loyalty) by unconsciously developing several shared illusions and related norms that interfere with critical thinking and reality testing" (p. 53). According to Janis, the symptoms of the groupthink mentality come in the form of three types: (a) overestimations of the group and its power and morality, (b) closed-mindedness, and (c) pressures toward uniformity. Therefore, to prevent groupthink from occurring in an educational institution's infrastructure when change is necessary, there must be an understanding that more viewpoints from different

groups within the design and improvement process for programs need to be expressed and heard, and the changes themselves must not be dictated by a small minority (Duffy, 2002; Janis, 1982).

According to Menand (2010), a college's general education curriculum can add to the new college student's frustration and anxiety. Menand argued that although there is a perception that general education courses are based on nonspecialized courses that students can take to earn college credit, the courses chosen as general education at the discretion of the faculty and administration of colleges often present preferences of general education courses not favorable to the college's student demographic. Although many colleges have potential benefits to continually review and analyze what courses are classified as general education from a progressive mindset, most would be reluctant because the decision makers could perceive such a notion as a challenge to their ideals or way of thinking (Menand, 2010).

Other Stakeholders

However, Menand (2010) noted that other stakeholders should be involved in the determining process regarding general education, including the college students themselves. For community college students who plan on transferring to a 4-year college or university after fulfilling most (if not all) of their general education requirements at the 2-year institution, the need to have a current broad education curriculum that provides the necessary courses that meet both the graduation and transfer requirements of the student is critical. More important, such general education offerings and requirements should provide an opportunity for those community college students to be engaged in the subject matter and not merely for what Menand described as being "non-specialized courses that

any student can enroll in with the hopes of learning something and getting a decent grade" (p. 23).

Building a community of success for students is crucial for their academic success. By establishing individual student success courses and programs promoting a society for students' success, students can understand the purpose of their academic success and how it is related to the surrounding community (O'Banion, 2017). According to O'Banion (2017), most first-time college students recognize that they require guidance to be successful; unfortunately, most do not understand how to seek that guidance. For this reason, O'Banion noted the importance for community colleges to solicit a learning environment in which engagement is encouraged and advertised by the colleges themselves; this will establish relationships from the student's first-semester experience and continue until the completion of the program.

However, to increase the probability that high school students can transition into both 2- and 4-year institutions properly, there needs to be a dialogue between high schools and higher education institutions regarding what is expected of the students themselves (Rodriquez et al., 2017). One method suggested by Rodriquez et al. (2017) to improve students' successful transition would be establishing a comparable curriculum between the high schools and higher education institutions to help prepare students to attend local higher institutions after high school. This collaborative effort caused by the two different educational institutions' levels would give each of them a more in-depth insight into its learning culture, ultimately ending with the collaborative effort establishing its own learning culture. Thus, from this new culture of learning, those students who transition from high school to college have a better opportunity for success.

Significance of the Academic Advisor

Early Studies

The significance of the relationship between academic advisors and college students has been long correlated. For example, Klingelhofer's (1954) initial research dealt with the relationship between college academic advisors and college students of probationary academic status within Iowa's state university system. Klingelhofer observed that although there was noticeable apprehension among the probationary college students assigned college counselors during the initial meeting, the impact of the meeting alone seemed to improve the students' academic progress.

Another important finding that Klingelhofer's (1954) study found concerning the college counselor and student relationship was how significant the meeting's structure was in the overall student's positive academic progression. More specifically, the meetings' quality factored into the educational improvements more than the actual quantity of appointments. According to Klingelhofer, when college counselors provided a formal guidance program initiated by a short but highly structured meeting that outlined the significance of the situation was a more advantageous option for the struggling student versus a cluster of interactions between the two parties with no natural substance. Through the initial structured meeting, academic counselors provided the opportunity to remind students of expectations, analyze current habits that resulted in insufficient academic progress, and develop a plan to help with improvement.

Even though Klingelhofer's (1954) research study indicated that the initial interview quality played an integral role in a student's academic progress more than the number of meetings, the initial meeting was not enough. Effective counseling-related

programs require continual engagement in which the student's counselor builds a rapport

with the students and earns their trust. Otherwise, there will always be the potential that

the student was reverting to their old habits, thus putting in jeopardy any forward

progress by the student and decreasing the chance of the college retaining the student

when other noneducational opportunities arise that might seem more favorable to the

student at present (Klingelhofer, 1954).

In an early study about the academic advisor and community college student

dynamic, Clark (1960) discovered the "gradual disengagement" of community college

students and their initial educational goals because of the students' negative interactions

with their respective academic advisors (p. 575). Clark hypothesized that the initial

interactions between the academic advisor and the student could start positively;

however, depending on the student's educational placement scoring and academic

progress in college, the relationship could slowly deteriorate. Clark indicated that when

academic advisors decide to take charge of the student's educational goals and lower or

alter those goals for the best interest of the students, they act as a "cooler" or "agent of

cooling" (p. 575).

Follow-Up Studies

Later studies beyond those previously discussed indicated that academic advisors

played a significant role in the student's decision to either remain or drop out of college,

which is evident within the model of student attrition (Donaldson et al., 2016; Tinto,

1975). Furthermore, according to Tinto (1975) and Donaldson et al. (2016), college

students who do not have the support factors that are necessary for success in higher

education from their families or other alternative support mechanisms often will not make

thoroughly logical decisions when faced with the hardships of college. Without the proper guidance that an academic advisor or career advisor could provide, when faced with adversity, the option of discontinuing one's education in exchange for a short-term opportunity in the workforce becomes a reasonable opportunity.

Based on a study that evaluated the experimental effectiveness of special programs designed to assist unprepared college students at the community college level during the 1950s and 1960s, Kulik et al. (1983) identified four special programs that helped high-risk students make the necessary academic adjustments required to be successful. One of these four special programs reviewed included academic advising and counseling programs, which according to the study, revealed that students often were more successful in their first year when such special programs were used by the students. Although this counseling/advising had initially been an optional service offered to high-risk students, the benefits became the norm after demonstrating both interest and favorable results by those students who participated (Kulik et al., 1983).

Several studies have indicated that transitioning from high school to the first year of college can be challenging for community college students (Light, 2001; Savi, 2011; Tinto, 1993). Whether or not students continue in school past the first year, their need for support services, such as first-year seminars, orientations and academic advising, onboarding, engagement centers, and tutoring, is evident (Tinto, 1993). In addition, as noted by Tinto (1993), those students entering 2-year higher education institutions (i.e., community colleges) are already typically faced with a longer completion time of 4-year degrees than those college students who enter 4-year institutions directly from high school. Therefore, community college students without the proper academic guidance

are prone to becoming frustrated and have a higher risk of dropping out of college before having the opportunity to complete a 2-year degree and transfer to a 4-year institution to complete their bachelor's degree and further improve their chances of obtaining higher-paying jobs that require the college degree (Tinto, 1993).

Good academic advising can be the most underestimated characteristic contributing to a college student's overall successful college experience (Light, 2001). According to Light (2001), one of the biggest problems faced when individuals transition from high school to college is allocating the appropriate amount of time, which often directly affects their academic performance. Furthermore, unlike high school, in which academic curriculum is chosen for the student and academic progress is monitored regularly, during that first year of college, many students experience for the first time the responsibility of their time management as well as educational planning, which can present numerous challenges (Light, 2001).

During the transition summer from high school to college, meeting with an academic advisor can not only assist with proper educational planning for the upcoming school year but also with building time management skills that can help the student balance nonacademic related activities such as work and social life (Light, 2001). In addition, academic advisors often have access to the necessary resources to benefit a college student's first-year experience and maximize retention potential. Also, Light (2001) suggested that academic advisors can connect social activities such as clubs relevant to the student's choice of primary or general interests that can help the student assimilate to the overall college experience.

Regardless of whether the academic advising role is filled by a staff member or faculty member, including counselors—either can provide the necessary resource to the student in need—what matters most is the ability of the advisor to help students recognize they possess the ability to make informed academic choices (Seidman, 2005). According to Seidman (2005), the quality of the interactions between community college students and those who provide academic guidance has been demonstrated to affect not only the student's success at the 2-year institution, but also after the student transfers to a 4-year institution to complete their educational journey. For those classified as disadvantaged from a socioeconomic perspective, this guidance is even more crucial for their success. In addition, students often take remedial coursework in English and mathematics, thus prolonging their community college tenure (Seidman, 2005).

Students naturally desire to have collegial relationships with those they identify as significant adults, including faculty and by other college professionals (Tinto, 2006). Although there are links related to the overall success of the college student based on which the curriculum is designed for students both within the classroom lecture and through the projects and assignments students are tasked with, the accountability should not merely rest on the academic faculty when dealing with rendition and academic success. According to Tinto (2006), college counselors or academic advisors are thus presented with the opportunity to become the significant adults needed by the students not only during the onboarding process for the students but also throughout the early stages of the students' academic careers when they are often most vulnerable to isolation and disconnect from both peers and the college itself.

Tinto and Pusser (2006) believed that academic advisors can take one of two approaches to help students get on the right track. The first type is the more common formal approach, in which the academic advisor meets with the student in a structured sit-down meeting to create a course of action (p. 6). However, Tinto and Pusser believed that the second approach can be more effective because this course of action deals with a more informal approach, in which the academic advisors incorporate accumulated knowledge and experience garnered throughout their interactions with both students and other members of the college community (i.e., faculty and staff) and include that in helping the student decide on a suitable game plan.

More Recent Studies

Karp et al. (2008), through interviews, determined that engagement and informal advising between academic advisors and community college students were commonly associated with the students' success. However, through their study, Karp et al. discovered that most of the meetings between academic advisors and community college students were for "very general" purposes, mainly consisting of a brief amount of time in which the goal was to solidify the student's course schedule and make courses selected meet the graduation requirements (p. 13). Furthermore, Karp et al. stated that from the beginning of the academic advisor and student dynamic, there was no indication that the development of a long-term commitment mattered because students were randomly paired with academic advisors for their initial meeting as well as during any follow-up meeting that may have been requested because the student had unanswered questions from the previous session or for other academic relations purposes.

According to Karp et al. (2008), the consensus from the community college students interviewed felt that they could have benefited more during their meeting with the academic advisor with mere suggestions of which professors to potentially take based on the advisor's knowledge and experience or even assistance in building a multisemester academic plan so that the students could plan their schedule ahead of time. During the student interviews, Karp et al. found out that each of the colleges observed had some specialized programs with specific academic advisors to assist its students further; however, the lack of engagement between the students and academic advisors resulted in feelings of disconnect from the student's perspective. One illustrated the process of signing up for courses as "throwing darts at a board," and many others indicated "experiencing feelings frustration and failure," resulting in a desire to drop out of college (p. 14).

Even though a study by Bahr (2008), which collected data from students from California community colleges, failed to support Clark's theory of "cooling out" occurring in terms of the academic advisor and student dynamic, his study did demonstrate the importance of the relationship in regard to the students' success. Instead of finding a negative correlation, Bahr (2008) discovered that academic advisors played a pivotal role in increasing community college students' educational success. Furthermore, Bahr clarified, "For those students who faced academic deficiencies, the active role of academic advising is even more influential" (p. 726).

With some community colleges having an unpreparedness rate of students as high as 95%, students lack the necessary skills to guide themselves through their community college experience, resulting in their inability to progress and the continued decreasing

completion rate status (McClenney, 2009). McClenney (2009) argued that a question is who should be held accountable for the proper guidance that many incoming community college students are challenged with. Based on different focus groups and interviews with college faculty and staff, McClenney found that the responsibility for the unpreparedness of the community college student often shifted to the high school teachers, administration, and staff, who include high school guidance counselors responsible for placing high school students in proper classes to prepare for college.

However, McClenney (2009) noted that the finger-pointing exhibited between high schools and community colleges should not distract the educational accountability of those put into positions of change once the student is part of the community college system, such as those who hold counseling/academic advising positions. According to McClenney, students identified as socioeconomically challenged face even more challenges to success when the needed resources are unavailable. Even with the higher probability of remedial status for community college students, with the proper academic planning through the assistance of academic advisors, in the end, students will effectively learn how to minimize the time spent at the 2-year institutional level while "knocking out" the remedial courses immediately upon starting college.

In a survey conducted by the American College Testing organization, one of the main factors attributed to community college students leaving within their first year was the lack of academic preparation based on their past educational experience (American College Testing, 2010). According to American College Testing (2010), one of the three most significant contributions to retaining students unprepared for higher institutionalized education came from academic advisors based on a previous study. Furthermore, based

on the American College Testing's (2010) study on retention contributions related practices, educational advising interventions were identified as one of the five core practices used by higher education institutions that had the most significant impact on student retention.

Although Savi (2011) recognized that there will always be those students who could be classified as highly self-regulated even at the community college level that will take the initiative to meet with academic advisors to construct a successful educational plan, for most community college students struggle with their academic journey. Community college students enroll with various goals, sometimes multiple objectives, that can lead to numerous issues and prolong the students' ability to meet those goals and stay within the community college system without the proper intervention. Through various studies and statistics, Savi noted that most community college students complete 1 year or less of coursework, and one third of the students entering their first year complete one semester or less.

Through her research study, Savi (2011) discovered that upon entering community college, the academic advisor's role in assisting new students in setting clear and attainable goals was crucial to their academic success and ability to transition the student to developing self-sufficient skills. By assisting students with developing short-term plans, academic advisors can help students build a sense of self-efficiency when each goal is met, building confidence within the student in progressing toward long-term goals. Therefore, community college students do not establish the self-efficiency skills necessary to complete their 2-year education but take those new skills to acquire when

continuing their education and transferring to a 4-year institution or seeking career-related goals (Savi, 2011).

However, in some cases, academic advisors' involvement depends on where they fall under a higher education institution's organizational structure (Ashby, 2018). For instance, academic advisors' responsibility might fall under the student services division at some community colleges, but the academic advisors fall under faculty at other community colleges. This situation can lead to communication problems between divisions, creating further issues with students' progress even with Guided Pathways programs.

During her research study, Rentsch (2018) discovered that sometimes there might be a need for restructuring for the Guided Pathways' efficiency to work. For example, in one of the community colleges observed during her research, reorganizing academic advisors under the academic affairs department helped students make the connection required to ensure optimal results. In addition, according to Rentsch, the reorganization allowed the onboarding process to transition smoothly to the academic advising aspect.

Several researchers in the higher education field agree that community college students generally do not seek advice that will benefit their academic progress; the burden of their academic success lies on others within the Guided Pathways initiative. For example, Shepherd (2018) argued that the responsibility for a student's academic success relies more heavily on the faculty and student engagement level. Also, Shepherd believed that how the faculty designed their coursework factors into students' ability to succeed.

Shepherd (2018) stated that faculty members should detect when students need assistance based on their academic progression. Instead, faculty members should take the responsibility to reach out to the students who, in their professional opinion, are seeking help and educational guidance even when the students themselves might not be aware of assistance being needed. Shepherd noted how this alternative can relieve the already overwhelmed academic advisors' heavy caseload by using this mentality and taking these courses of action.

Because the goal for approximately 80% of community college students is to transfer to a 4-year institution after completing their general education, the reality is that less than 35% of community students will achieve that goal and transfer within a 6-year timeframe (Jabbar et al., 2019). Based on Jabbar et al. (2019), robust academic advising, which consisted of advisors aligning more with their students' target goals, often showed a positive correlation to the student's ability to transfer to a 4-year institution. Jabbar et al. identified that those who experienced an unsuccessful transfer process often "suffered from one or more of the psychosocial factors: a sense of belonging, intimidation about the process, and resiliency" (p. 10).

However, when community college academic advisors took the initiative to connect their students not only to resources within their college but also to the resources at the prospective universities and colleges the students were interested in transferring to, the results were more favorable because the students were less likely to face any of the three psychosocial factors (Jabbar et al., 2019). Additionally, Jabbar et al. (2019) indicated that "strong advising is an excellent way to supplement existing sources of

capital and can help or hinder students' paths to transfer success but that it works in combination with other factors to shape student outcomes" (p. 10).

Street-Level Bureaucracy

According to Lipsky (2010), studies have indicated that those who best understand how a policy works most effectively are not the actual bureaucrats and top-level administrators. They pass such laws when handling public policy and public administration-related matters. Instead, the most affected are public servants who daily operate the frontlines and deal with the public members most affected by these policies developed from higher authority. This portion of Lipsky's study helped to validate why the frontline public service employees, such as academic advisors, consistently deal with community college students daily.

In a more recent research study, Howard (2017) discussed how academic advisors in public higher education systems often act as street-level bureaucrats to derive the right solutions to assist needy students. Studies have shown that the relationship between academic advisors and students often goes beyond one's job responsibility, preferably in most cases; academic advisors have a willingness to form a connection with the students under their guidance based on a purely human level, which can lead to higher success rates (Howard, 2017). Thus, academic advisors are the persistent support system required to ensure that disadvantaged public college students reach their graduation goals.

Furthermore, public college academic advisors incorporate the street-level bureaucratic mentality to maximize those students' probability of completing college. Even though Howard's (2017) study on DREAMer students in general, the academic advisors within the public higher education institutions who influence the overall success

of DREAMer and non-DREAMer students represent those whom his research study identified as public servants. According to Howard, those engaged with their academic advisors at public higher education institutions (including community colleges) were likely to complete their educational goals in terms of degree completion without excess credits and prolonging their academic journey.

Legislation to Support Learning

Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012 (SB 1456)

Most of the progress for reform within the California community college system within the last decade, including the passing of Assembly Bill 705 ([AB 705], 2017) and the implementation of the Guided Pathways ideology, can be attributed to the Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012. Passed into California legislation on September 2, 2012, the purpose of SB 1456 was to increase the access and success of California community colleges through the creation of effective "core matriculation services of orientation, assessment and placement, counseling, and other education planning services, and academic interventions" (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2012, para. 5). Through a collaborative effort by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and its board of supervisors, they considered the 22 recommendations by the appointed Student Success Task Force in 2011. As a result, they developed a core of eight focus areas to make the necessary changes (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2015).

California Assembly Bill 705 (AB 705)

Signed into California legislation on October 13, 2017, by then-Governor Jerry Brown, AB 705 was to minimize the chances of California community college students

taking unnecessary remedial courses in English and mathematics subject matters

(California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-e). According to the

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (n.d.-e), previous studies had shown

evidence that, in general, within the California community college system, students were

typically thrown into remediation level English and mathematical courses even though

other studies have shown that community college students who had been enrolled directly

into 4-year transfer-level English and mathematical courses demonstrated significant

academic success. By minimizing the chances of students taking an abundance of

remedial classes, community colleges could help expedite the overall transfer or

completion process for the student while also reducing the chances of students dropping

out because of slow educational progress, especially when referencing students of color,

who make up a majority of the student demographic within the California community

college system (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-e).

As noted by Shaw et al. (2018), the implementation of AB 705 mandated

California community colleges to reevaluate and restructure their assessment placement

procedures to ensure the maximization of the probability that their student would be able

to enter and complete transfer-level English and mathematics courses within a year, or

within 3 years for those students who begin at English as a second language (ESL) level

courses. Before the passing of AB 705, most California community colleges relied

heavily on their students' placement through standard multihour assessment testing in

English and mathematics. However, with the integration of AB 705, the California

community college system was recommended to check one or more of the following

measurements of students: (a) high school coursework, (b) high school grades in English

and mathematic courses, or (c) overall high school grade point average (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-e).

Implementation Timeline

Although AB 705 took effect on January 1, 2018, California community colleges had until the start of fall 2019 to comply. To meet this deadline, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office required all California community college districts to submit a placement method for English and mathematics that incorporated either guided or self-placement methodologies compliant with Title 5 Section 55522 regulations no later than July 1, 2019, for the Chancellor's Office approval (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-e). In addition, for accountability and continual improvement measures, each California community college district provided preliminary reports after 1 year of implementing its new approved placement method, which was to be evaluated and could require changes to the process in place.

Like the majority of California community colleges, before the passing of AB 705, both Institution A and Institution B had used the multihour multiple-choice assessment testing approach as their primary mechanism for placement of their students, by which students were given their results and suggested placement immediately after their tests were graded. Students had the option to retest after a minimum of one academic year or appeal the process based on evaluation of previous coursework completed by the student at the high school or college level, which could further delay students' progression under the institutions' placement methods, assessment testing as eliminated and replaced with a placement survey.

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Both Institution A and Institution B implemented a placement survey method during the 2018-2019 academic year, which consisted of a nine-question survey that asked students questions about their GPA in high school, the highest level of English and mathematics courses in high school, and associated grades to that coursework. In addition, understanding that some students struggle with math, a few placement survey questions try to narrow areas of shared struggles along with questions specifically for ESL-related students. Once the placement survey is completed and submitted by the student, there is a 24- to 48-hour business day turnaround in which the student's response is evaluated, and recommended English and mathematics courses are provided to the student based on their selected major or in general for those who are undecided about their major.

Outdated Cafeteria Approach

One of the biggest detriments to the longstanding cafeteria approach used by most of the community college systems in the United States was that incoming students could often become overwhelmed with options when selecting an academic or career avenue. For some of these students, the notion is to start taking random coursework with the potential to delay their stay at the community college level. For other students who find themselves in the same predicament, there is the potential for them to become discouraged and never move further than the onboarding process and decide to opt out of college before genuinely starting.

When taking into consideration the consequences of the cafeteria approach, the first pillar of the Guided Pathways program was designed for colleges to "clarify the path" for the incoming students, in which the community college is responsible for

"clarifying pathways and providing guidance throughout their education [to] ensure more students complete a degree, transfer to a four-year college, and increase their earning potential" (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2016, para. 4). Santa Monica College, which has long been recognized as having one of the top California community college transfer rates to the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) 4-year institutions, has set the precedence for the Guided Pathways transfer process's ideals L. Gordon (2014) mentioned that Santa Monica College alone was responsible for over 5% of the 110+ California community college transfer students to the UC system during the 2012–2013 academic year.

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Role of Guided Pathways at Community College Level

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As noted by Bailey et al. (2015), the majority of the community colleges within the United States had had a history of offering their students a cafeteria model approach when students were directed to class selection, which directly contributed to the low success rate of their students. Under this cafeteria approach, community college students relied on their self-guidance to navigate through their college's class catalogs and schedules, which often led to these same students making ill-advised decisions about what major to select from and what courses to take that would meet general education and major requirements because of uncertainty about when to seek assistance from supportive services offered by the college. Because of such experiences, the community college student became disengaged and ultimately dropped out, mostly when the student was of minority status (Bailey et al., 2015).

According to Bailey et al. (2015), even those community college students who can be regarded as persistent in their academic endeavors often struggle to complete the

required courses within the ideal 2-year period. Instead, most students do not pursue full-time student status (i.e., 12-15 units per semester) and opt to remain part-time and noncontinuous enrollment. Thus, even though for those community college students who are eventually able to complete their requirements for a degree, certificate, or transfer to a 4-year institution, there is a likelihood of the student having an overage of college credits that are nontransferable and non-career related, which equate to a waste of time and resources of the student that could have been otherwise used had the proper guidance been provided to the student from the start of their academic journey.

Push Toward Guided Pathways

In an effort to deter these negative trends of the recent group of community college students, there has been a significant increase in the adaptation of the Guided Pathways ideology throughout the United States. Boerner (2016) proclaimed that the push by the community college system toward the Guided Pathways road was due to their desire to move away from the ineffective way of letting students be solely responsible for finding their academic and career paths because the old-fashioned cafeteria approach had established replacing their journey with continual structure and guidance from the beginning of their educational journey. By integrating the Guided Pathways at the community college level, a better opportunity for the system's students is provided, so they do not flounder because they have a clear understanding of what is required of them to complete their education, whether the students' educational pathway is for career-based, workforce training, associate's degree, or to transfer to a 4-year college at a junior-level standing (Boerner, 2016).

The framework of the Guided Pathways program relies on the foundation of its four pillars, as exhibited in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Four Pillars of Guided Pathways
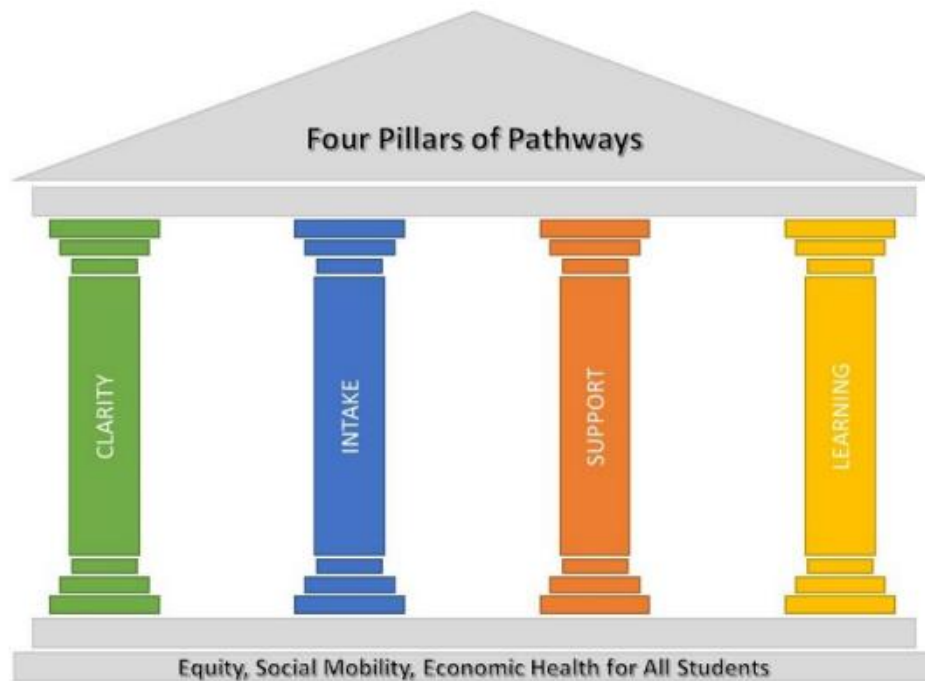
Note. From *Strategic Planning Report Card* (p. 2), by Riverside City College, 2019 (https://www.rcc.edu/assets/documents/about/strategic-planning/planning-documents/RCC%20Strategic%20Planning%20Report%20Card%20Mar2019%20FINAL.pdf).

Clarify the Path

Santa Monica College (n.d.) believes that as students make the transition to the first pillar of the Guided Pathways structure, community colleges should strive to provide their incoming students a precise visual mapping of all its programs offered while taking into consideration its students' long-term goal whether the choice is to transfer to a 4-year institution or is more career-minded. According to Santa Monica College, community

colleges provide detailed information on their students' target career and transfer outcomes while including essential information on course sequence options for the students along with recommendations for complementary general education and elective courses that align with the students' interest; this can assist in laying the proper foundation necessary for its students toward the second pillar of Guided Pathways.

Even with a clear understanding of all the options available to them at the community college, when the student enters the realm of the second pillar of the Guided Pathways entitled "enter the path," the role of the support system offered by the community college becomes more crucial. As students close in on making that first significant decision by selecting their pathway of choice and planning out their first year of academics, having access to reliable advisors and support staff is a necessity that must be provided by the community college. Although the final decision making falls on the students, the proper guidance and ability to assess their academic level must be present. Essentially, according to Jenkins, Lahr, Fink, and Ganga (2018), within this second pillar, incoming students along with an academic advisor work collectively to develop a thorough educational plan and program of study finalized by the completion of the student's first academic semester.

Enter the Path

Also, Jenkins, Lahr, Fink, and Ganga (2018) noted that under the second pillar of the Guided Pathways, the goal is for students to divert from the commonplace general placement of prerequisite remedial coursework track to a pathway in which the mathematics and English courses are relevant to the actual field of interest of the student. According to the CCRC research, when community colleges send students with the

remedial track option, they often do not effectively build their college skills as well as their counterparts (Jenkins, Lahr, Fink, and Ganga 2018). Dayton, Ohio-based Sinclair Community College has been recognized for its efforts in exemplifying the ideas of the second pillar because its students are required to have a follow-up meeting with their academic advisors at the end of the first term, in which they go over interests and associated options and design a full-program career and transfer plan along with an effective monitoring plan of action (Jenkins, Lahr, Fink, and Ganga 2018).

Stay on the Path

This established relationship between the student and academic advisor helps with the third pillar's ideals or Stay on the Path pillar. Within the third pillar, academic advisors must monitor their student's progress using various resources including up-to-date technologies (Jenkins, Lahr, Fink, and Ganga 2018). Student awareness of the same resources available to them is equally essential to access them as they move along their educational plans. The most significant help available to the students and their success comes directly from the educational institution, which provides adequate access to the courses required to complete their educational goals within the planned timeframe.

Understanding that some students might require more guidance than others because they might stray off course for various reasons, there is a need for a proper student-to-academic advisor ratio to ensure each student gets sufficient time when needed. For such reasons, Jenkins, Lahr, Fink, Ganga, Kopko, et al. (2018) argued that to fulfill the success of this pillar, colleges must provide the proper support to their academic advisors and other student support-related staff, who then give the aid directly to the students. For example, Jackson College, a community college in Michigan,

realized that during its redesign process to accommodate the Guided Pathways program, it needed to hire additional academic advisors among other staffing needs to lower its student to academic advisor ratio to 250:1, which was drastically different from its previous 1750:1 rate.

Ensure Learning

As noted by the Karau-Magnani (2019), the Guided Pathways program's fourth and final pillar is highly centered on the importance of teaching, even though the California community college adaptation of the Guided Pathways ideals fails to recognize this notion. Under this pillar, California community colleges should be cautious of assuming that just because they have more than capable, skilled, and experienced faculty to educate their students does not necessarily mean its students themselves are automatically ensured to be learning the material that is presented within the classroom (May, 2017). Ensuring learning as the fourth pillar begins with the faculty of the community colleges acknowledging their role as the architects of the learning system and remembering to implement an equity framework to their final course structure (May, 2017).

However, although the four-pillar foundation is mainly structured based on the California community colleges' faculty, academic advisors play a significant role. Jenkins, Lahr, Fink, and Ganga (2018) argued that success within this fourth pillar requires a collaborative effort between faculty and nonfaculty community college staff. As noted by Jenkins, Lahr, Fink, and Ganga, although the faculty can help with teaching and learning within the classroom, academic advisors can help assist community college

students with applying that new knowledge and gaining real-world experience through such opportunities as co-ops, internships, or project-based learning.

Moving Along the Path

Each of the Guided Pathway's pillars plays an integral part in a community college's student support and success process and must be followed in chronological order to maximize the success of both the program itself and the student the program supports, as exhibited in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Progression Through the Four Pillars of Guided Pathways: California Community Colleges
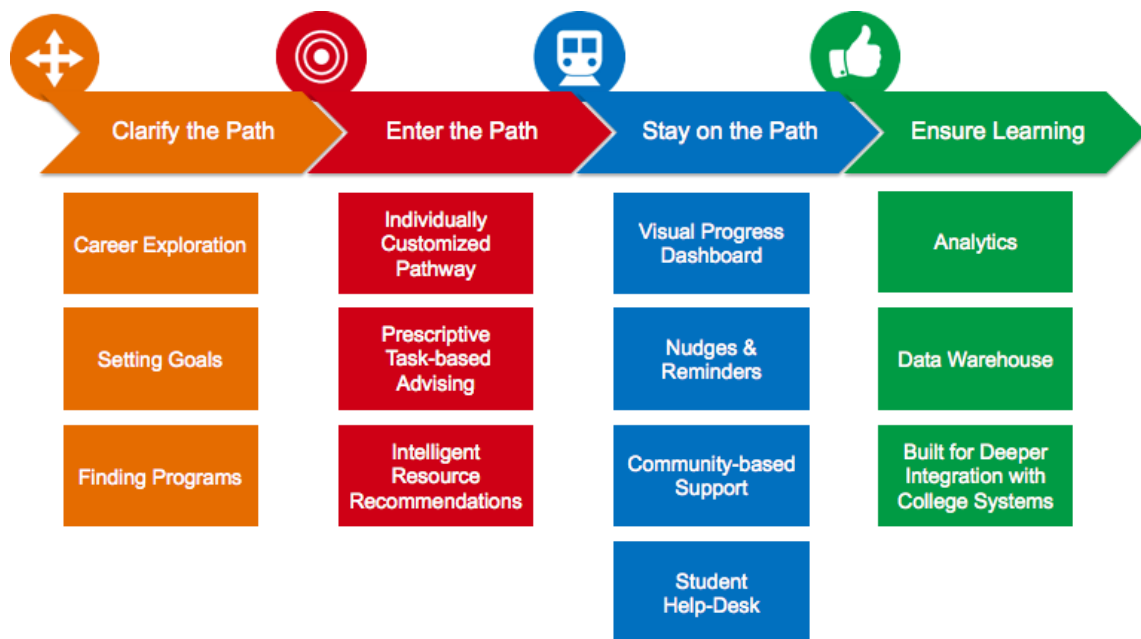
Note. From "CCC MyPath" (p. 1), by California Community Colleges Technology Center, n.d. (https://cccmypathproject.org/projects/ccc-mypath).

As community college students transition from one pillar to another, each student must have the resources necessary for their progress to occur correctly. The frontline support employees at the college, such as the academic advisors, are required.

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Making the Career Connection

Within the structure of the first pillar of Guided Pathways, ideally, the community college student is presented with various potential careers of interest, typically with an academic advisor's assistance. Setting goals begins after making a career choice of interest (or sometimes multiple choices). Making the connection becomes crucial for academic advisors to connect to appropriate programs of study and relevant pathways. Based on a study conducted by Woods et al. (2017) environments in which community college students had planned to transfer to a 4-year institution after graduation indicated that academic advising connected the students' general education to majors, career options, and degree options were invaluable to the students' success.

Establishing the Path

Once the career connection is determined and the relevant pathway program(s) are analyzed, the academic advisor's customized course selections are crucial for the community college student. Prescreening assessments cannot necessarily indicate the students' potential academic performance. According to Allen et al. (2013), "Community college students indicated that having advisors consider their 'skills, abilities, and interests,' or non-cognitive factors that would not be captured on a standardized test was important when assisting with course selection and registration" (p. 336). Therefore, academic advisors must do another critical task during this preparation period to identify any college resources that could benefit the student's educational journey.

Continuous Reinforcement

As new community college students enter their first academic year, their academic advisor and other college resources' ongoing presence becomes pivotal.

According to Kot (2014), at the community college level, the formation of centralized advising centers has been positively related to students' first and second-semester grade point averages (GPAs), and overall, the first-year GPA and negatively related to student attrition. Within these centralized advising centers, students can get any necessary academic support, advising support, technical support, and other essential support services to encourage positive academic progress through their chosen pathway.

Evaluating the Experience

If California community colleges want to experience continued success, measurements must be set to analyze their progress. Students' success cannot be based simply on grades earned but on their retention levels and ability to apply that new knowledge to their future education and career pursuits. Although this part of the process is focused on faculty and is administrative based, feedback from academic advisors and the student experience from a noncognitive perspective can be highly beneficial.

<div align="center">Need for Cultural and Leadership Change</div>

For the Guided Pathways programs to be adequately implemented at a community college, there are some necessary changes that the college must endure, most notably a culture change. Jenkins et al. (2017) noted that Indian River State College's (IRSC) President Dr. Edwin Massey, who has long been credited with the evolution of the Guided Pathways program, learned firsthand that for progression to occur, his college's culture was required to change its mindset to one in which the student's success was the primary focal point of the college itself. At IRSC, which had also been transiting from a 2-year to 4-year college during this same timeframe, the culture of the college and its

leadership team had to transition from a longstanding top-down to a down-up cultural approach when the transition came to guiding operations (Jenkins et al., 2017).

Down-Up Approach

According to Jenkins et al. (2017), Dr. Massey felt that even from a down-up cultural approach, that the college's administration team should continue to set the vision for the college; however, when supporting the college's students properly, they had first to keep the ideas of frontline staff. According to Jenkins et al., making the transition to the IRSC's organizational culture, in which the individuals who worked directly with its college students daily were allowed to share their insight and opinions during the idea generation process, helped in the development process of what later established the foundation of Guided Pathways program.

President Daniel Phelan of Jackson College (a community college) validated Massey's argument that the Guided Pathways program and a supportive culture for its students without first establishing a supportive culture with the college staff affects the progression of the college's students (Boerner, 2016). Through the use of a total commitment to student success or TCS-squared mentality, Jackson College was able to establish 13 guiding beliefs directed toward their students' support and success along with the new mission and value statements, which helped lead to the restructuring of the college's hiring process and employee recognition efforts (Jenkins et al., 2017). New hires were not only trained to be well versed in these new 13 beliefs regarding the college's students, but the college rewarded all employees who demonstrated exemplary efforts with small merit bonuses.

Elements of Leadership Change

According to Phelan et al. (2016), influential leaders within the community college system are those who understand the science of implementing and advancing change are those who can recognize the three necessary critical elements for change to occur. These three crucial elements include (a) being able to identify there is a current dissatisfaction with its organization's current practices and operations, (b) a well-articulated vision of the institution's transformation, and (c) a defined and broadly communicated implementation plan. Researcher David Gleicher devised a mathematical formula to represent an institution's change probability when all three critical elements were met, designated as $D \times V \times F > R = \triangle$ (Phelan et al., 2016).

Under Gleicher's mathematical formula for the probability of change, the first three variables (i.e., D, V, and F) complement the three critical elements required for growth (Phelan et al., 2016). First, variable "D" represents the various levels of dissatisfaction by the institution's employees concerning the current situation. In contrast, variable "V" means an institution's visual goal, outlining how this visual goal can achieve and at what costs (nonmonetary) for the institution's employees. Next, variable "F" of the formula represents the initial steps in respect to the institution's visual goals. In contrast, the variable "R" represents the levels of resistance from an institution's employees because of the implementation of the changes (Phelan et al., 2016).

In conclusion, although systems are in place that explain the importance of the academic advisor–California community college student dynamic and the role by which the Guided Pathways provides the student's success, there is a gap in the process that can

explain the slow movement of success. Chapter 3 describes this study that sought not only to address the current challenges faced by academic advisors when dealing with the success of the Guided Pathways programs but also to provide data to provide recommendations that could further provide resources to assist the academic advisor–California community college student dynamic in relation to success within the Guided Pathways program.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perspectives of academic advisors who are servicing the needs of students within the California community colleges participating in the Guided Pathways initiative. In addition, the study sought to provide a detailed understanding of the perceptions of (a) the academic advisor's role in the community college meeting the goals outlined by the California Guided Pathways initiative and (b) the community college's role in affecting the success rate of students enrolled in the Guided Pathways-based programs.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions for this study:

Primary Research Question: From an academic advisor's (i.e., counselor and educational advisor) perspective, what role does the advisor play in California community colleges' ability to meet the goals outlined by the California Guided Pathways initiative?

Secondary Research Question: From an academic advisor's perspective, what are the critical issues California community colleges need to address to increase student success in California Guided Pathways-based programs?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that seemed most appropriate for this research study was Tinto's (1993) integration framework. According to Tinto, student retention in a college is favorable when students can make both a social and academic life connection with the college. However, Tinto believed that community college students have more difficulty making these connections because the typical community college student's

background is significantly different from their 4-year counterparts for various demographic reasons. The foundation of the integration framework relies heavily on the concept of social integration, which is why those at the community college level often fail to achieve it. Unlike their 4-year institution counterparts, community college students do not have the opportunity to experience the same socially engaging events and activities that students living in college dormitories and apartments have. Instead, community college students commute to their respective colleges for classes and have personal and work commitments, minimizing the social and academic engagements that they participate in (Tinto, 1993).

However, in more recent years, studies have shown that these differences can be minimized through a community college's ability to provide the necessary student support services to its students and the accessibility of those resources to the students (Gantt, 2019; O'Banion, 2017; Woods et al., 2017). Community college students can learn the importance of engagement with their academic advisors who can use available support services to connect students to these resources (O'Banion, 2017). Furthermore, the increasing emergence of online academic advising within community colleges has provided new avenues for student academic engagement while improving social connections throughout the college and its students (Woods et al., 2017). Finally, for Gantt (2019), the consistency of academic advising increases the chances of community college students graduating and promotes viable social development that the student leaves the college with upon completion.

Community college advisors are invaluable to the success of the college's students because advisors are attentive to all of the required core elements for success

(Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2018). In addition, through the construction of well-developed academic plans, connecting students to the proper academic, financial, and social resources, community college academic advisors also help students feel welcomed and socially engaged on campus through either clubs or student activities related to their chosen pathway (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2018).

Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological research design was used for this research study. First, firsthand qualitative data were collected through one-on-one interviews with academic advisors from two California community colleges who were both participants of the California Guided Pathways Project overseen by the California Community College Chancellor's Office. After completing the 12 interviews, the researcher reviewed the transcripts of each interview for nodes, which were later translated to themes presented in Chapter 4.

Qualitative Approach

When considering this study's purpose and research questions, the researcher determined that a qualitative methodological approach would be appropriate for collecting data. The researcher believed that because the study dealt with students' social behavior, a qualitative approach would garner more in-depth data that would help to answer the two proposed research questions. Using a qualitative approach, the researcher determined that through interviews, he could collect various firsthand insights from academic advisors that would help explain the statistical data already available on the subject matter.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that a qualitative research approach is typically used when a researcher wants to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a particular social or human problem. Researchers who employ a qualitative approach can collect data for their studies firsthand by observing participants within the participants' natural environment (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Once the researcher had finished collecting the qualitative data, he took the participants' narrative responses and incorporated them into meanings and themes (Patton, 2015).

Phenomenology

There are several reasons why the researcher used a phenomenological research study approach. The primary reason a phenomenological methodological approach was chosen was that this approach would minimize the possibility for researcher bias. In research study, there is a concept known as "bracketing" that is taken into consideration, in which the researcher identifies and keeps in check any preconceived personal beliefs, opinions, or notions about the phenomenon that is being researched; instead, there is an analytical goal of attending (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

The researcher's bias was a concern for this study because of the nature of the researcher's job within the California community college system, which deals daily with dissatisfied students and other members of the supporting community. To minimize any bias, the researcher designed the study in which academic advisors would be allowed to share their own experiences and enable the researcher to determine whether there were any correlations between the researcher's own experiences concerning the consistently low full-time enrollment status despite the integration of the Guided Pathways program.

Also, within the ideology of a phenomenological research approach, there is an understanding that even when previous studies on the same subject matter may exist, each phenomenological study can discover new data contributing to the subject matter. By taking a phenomenological research approach, rather than looking for measurements or explanations of a situation, an experience's essence or meaning is accounted for (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). More importantly, saturation is recognized as necessary when using a phenomenological research approach, which was beneficial for collecting data for this research study. According to Bernard (2012), when trying to reach data saturation in qualitative studies, the researcher can benefit from using interviews, one of the most effective methods for data collection. The study's interview sample size depends on the researcher.

Theoretical Framework

Human Relations Theory

Human relations theory began to garner interest in the United States during the pre-and post-Great Depression era as research studies such as the Hawthorne studies conducted at Western Electric's plant between 1924 and 1927 led the way (Hersey et al., 1996). The focus of the Hawthorne studies was not centered on human relations but instead on productivity, and the original studies incorrectly linked the increase in lighting to increased productivity. When reexamined, these original studies led to the progression of the importance of human relations. As noted by Hersey et al. (1996) that later reexaminations of the original study after theorist Elton Mayo's seemingly accidental revelation during his study at the same plant between 1928 and 1932 was able to determine the correlation between the lighting and increased productivity of workers at

the Western Electric plant was not accurate, the significant discovery was made that the increase in productivity by the plant's workers could be attributed to the interpersonal relationships established by the plant's management and workers.

Theorist Abraham Maslow's research in human relations helped develop his famed hierarchy of needs model in 1943, which categorized the three types of needs as either essential, psychological, or self-fulfillment needs (Shafritz et al., 2016). According to Shafritz et al. (2016), under the basic needs category (lowest) of Maslow's hierarchy lie one's physiological needs, which consist of the most basic needs in life (i.e., food, water, warmth, and sleep) and safety needs (i.e., security and stability). The next categorized level of Maslow's hierarchy first includes one's love/belongingness needs (i.e., intimacy, acceptance, and social interactions) and then esteem needs (i.e., feeling of accomplishment, recognition, and attention), which help satisfy one's psychological needs (Shafritz et al., 2016).

Inspired by the works of his predecessor Maslow in identifying individual motivations, theorist Frederick Herzberg contributed to the study of human relations by conducting 200 extensive interviews of engineers and accountants from several different industries in the Pittsburgh area, which ultimately led to the development of his two-factory theory (or motivation-hygiene theory) in 1959 (Hersey et al., 1996). As published in *Motivation to Work,* Herzberg's research study determined that one's satisfaction and dissatisfaction within one's environment are interdependent, and the responses by individuals were factored by different internal and external stimuli (Hersey et al., 1996). According to Herzberg, improving motivators would increase one's satisfaction within a

job environment, and improving hygiene factors would result in a reverse effect (Hersey et al., 1996).

Classical Organizational Theory

Classical organizational theory has been recognized as one of the most back-dated theoretical domains because the theory has ties back to the days of the ancient Greek philosophy of Socrates (Shafritz et al., 2016). However, the classical organizational theory began to be noticed during the industrial revolution in Europe during the late 1700s and was further acknowledged because of theorists, most notably Adam Smith (Shafritz et al., 2016). Through his publication of *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776, Smith introduced the concept of the "invisible hand," which elaborated on how the most optimal outcome for production was a direct result of production efficiency (Shafritz et al., 2016).

During the mid-1800s, the classical organizational theory continued to thrive through the progressive efforts of theorist Daniel McCallum (Shafritz et al., 2016). In his research, McCallum developed a reporting system that would allow managers to determine the efficiency of an organization based on its ability to divide the responsibilities, revealing whether and when errors in the process were made (Shafritz et al., 2016).

During the early 1900s, the classical organizational theory saw its most significant progress made through the works of American theorist Fredrick Taylor, commonly referred to as the father of scientific management, who published his *The Principle of Scientific Management* in 1911 (Shafritz et al., 2016; F. W. Taylor, 1967). Unlike previous efficiency studies that used a single model structure, through the ideology of scientific management, Taylor argued that to increase efficiency within an organization, a

series of methods was required and relied on the direction of managers (Shafritz et al., 2016; F. W. Taylor, 1967). Taylor's scientific management discovery was even more impactful to classical organizational theory because the theory could be applied to private and public business administrative structures. French theorist Henri Fayol's *General and Industrial Management*, published in 1949, verified this new revelation of scientific management (Fayol & Gray, 1984; Shafritz et al., 2016).

Approximately 10 years after Fredrick Taylor's discovery, German theorist Max Weber contributed to classical organizational theory through a sociological approach (Harmon & Mayer, 1986). Through his study of bureaucratic organizations, Weber made a connection between the ancient bureaucracies from various European and Asian countries and regions to help frame what he believed to be an ideal bureaucracy and then used this same framework to identify six significant variables or characteristics of any bureaucratic organization (Harmon & Mayer, 1986).

Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2014) defined a population as "a group of individuals or events from which a sample is drawn and to which results can be generalized" (p. 5). For this study, the population was academic advisors from California community colleges. As of 2019, 116 community colleges were part of 74 districts in California (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-b). The quantity of academic advisors varies at each community college because the position often depends on a community college's enrollment of full-time equivalent (FTE) students and the availability of grant funding for specific student services support groups such as

Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) and the California Work

Opportunities & Responsibilities to Kids (CalWORKs).

As noted by Martinez and Elue (2020), "Academic advising is one of the most

effective retention strategies utilized by U.S. colleges and universities … especially

important within community colleges" (p. 1010). Bailey (2017) posited that the role of

the academic advisor is pivotal to the success of community college students and Guided

Pathways because academic advisors are often the ones responsible for that first crucial

engagement with the student and who follow up with the student regularly, both of which

help with retention. In addition, academic advisors are responsible for helping students

to not only obtain the map for their academic success but also for guiding them

throughout that same map when obstacles may appear to deter the students from that goal

(Bailey, 2017).

Sampling Frame

The sampling frame for a study is considered a subset of the overall general

population of a study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). At the same time, a target

population for a study refers to a group of participants representing a smaller percentage

of the total population and exhibiting characteristics of significance (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018).

For this study, the target population was academic advisors from institutions

currently participating in the California Guided Pathways Project. The sampling frame of

this study consisted of 12 academic advisors with a minimum of 1 year of experience

from Southern California institutions participating in the California Guided Pathways

Project, which narrows down the applicable community colleges from 20 to 12. Eligible

community colleges for this study were from Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego. Of the 12 eligible institutions, two institutions were chosen by the researcher to solicit participation from academic advisors.

Sample

The research study sample consists of individuals from whom data are collected and who often represent a larger specific population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The researcher used a purposeful sampling method when selecting the community colleges to solicit interviews. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) stated that when dealing with purposeful sampling, the researcher can choose elements that will either be informative or adequately represent the topic on hand. Through purposeful sampling, the researcher centered on academic advisors from California community colleges.

For qualitative studies, Guest et al. (2006) stated that suitable sample size can range from six to 12 participants for data collection purposes because this range eliminates the potential for saturating or repeating data. Furthermore, Patten (2012) argued that the study's sample size quality directly affects the sample's data to reflect the larger population. Therefore, according to Patten, researchers should ask themselves whether the sample size is sufficient or whether biases are prevalent in the sample to minimize the quality issues.

The researcher's main objective was to develop a small sample that could be considered a logical representation of the population. Therefore, the researcher looked only at colleges currently part of the California Guided Pathways Project. Potential institutions to represent the sample were found on the California Guided Pathways

Project website, which listed the 20 participating California community colleges for the 2019–2020 academic year.

There were several important reasons for seeking institutions that met the established criteria. First, Institution A and Institution B are community colleges participating in Southern California's Californian Guided Pathways initiative. Second, the researcher met with the college's presidents in person, provided the details of the dissertation study, and addressed any concerns before moving on to the next step. Third, both administrators were advocates of the California Guided Pathways initiative and its statewide success within the community college system. Finally, they supported the research study by granting the necessary permits required by the California Baptist University's Institutional Review Board committee to continue the Expedited application process.

Using purposeful sampling, the participants for this study were required to meet the following criteria:

- Participants were employed as educational advisors or academic counselors at Institution A or Institution B.

- Participants were not in their first year of employment within the California community college system. In addition, each participant must have a minimum of 1 year of experience dealing with prospective or current California community college students attending either Institution A or Institution B.

- Participants were familiar with the basics of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Guided Pathways initiative and related programs offered at either Institution A or Institution B.

- Understand AB 705 that went into effect during the fall 2019 academic semester at Institution A and Institution B. The bill changed the assessment placement process for students planning or attending a community college within California in English and mathematics coursework.

This research study aimed to examine the connections between students and academic advisors at the community college level. Therefore, all participants had to be either educational advisors or academic counselors. For the second criterion, the minimum of 1 year of experience requirement was due to interview questions asked by the researcher during the collection process specific to the knowledge of Institution A and Institution B programs dating back to the 2019–2020 academic year. These questions exempted anyone with less than 1 year of firsthand experience because the participant would not be able to respond to such questions appropriately. Considering that there could have been some new educational advisors and academic counselors hired at the targeted community colleges when the interview process began, all of these individuals with less than 1 year of experience were deemed ineligible to participate in this study to maintain its validity and integrity of the research study.

The third and fourth criteria for participants were significantly connected. Considering how AB 705 changed the process in which prospective community college students are placed in English and mathematics along with how core-requisites factor into some of the students' successful advancement in the subject matter, the participants needed to be familiar with the criteria of the bill. At least one of the interview questions asked by the researcher during the interview process dealt with prior assessment testing practices used by California community colleges such as Institution A and Institution B

and the perceived changes concerning assisting students in academic planning during the transitional process to meet the new standards as a result of AB 705.

Recruitment for participants began once the researcher received IRB approval from both Institution A and Institution B's IRB committees. Institution A's IRB committee was approved on February 21, 2020, and Institution B's IRB committee on June 5, 2020. The COVID-19 global pandemic caused a delay with Institution B's IRB committee approval. Solicited emails (Appendix A) inviting prospective participants to interview were sent to every educational advisor and counselor at Institution A and Institution B between June 17, 2020, and June 18, 2020, along with an Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) to be signed by the prospective participant to take part in the interview process. A revised Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) was sent to prospective participants who indicated they did not have a method of scanning a signed copy of their Informed Consent Form. Upon receiving the Informed Consent Form from prospective participants, the researcher sent a reply email with the attachment Preinterview Questionnaire (Appendix D) to gather demographic information about the prospective participant as well as a means to double-check the prospective participants met all four of the established criteria for participants.

In total, 15 prospective participants responded to the initial email sent by the researcher. Of those 15 prospective participants, two individuals decided to withdraw from the interview process before it was conducted. One other prospective participant was eliminated from the interview process because upon review of the individual's responses submitted via the Preinterview Questionnaire, they did not meet one of the required participant criteria established for this study. According to Guest et al. (2006),

six to 12 participants are sufficient for qualitative studies because the range minimizes data saturation; therefore, the 12 participants were a sufficient sample size for this study based on Guest et al.'s criteria with a confidence level of 90% and a margin of error at 10% based on the total population size.

Instrumentation

The researchers themselves act as the primary instrument in qualitative research studies because they serve as the investigating agent tasked with collecting and analyzing the data (Creswell, 2013). The researcher used open-ended (i.e., semistructured interview questions that addressed this research study's questions to gather the qualitative data. One advantage of interviewing with open-ended questions is that the researcher can ask unscripted clarifying and probing questions when necessary (Patten, 2012). The researcher generated eight questions and subquestions incorporating this study's purpose and research questions (Appendix E).

Confidentiality

All the materials used for the duration of the data collection process (i.e., one-on-one interviews) were provided at the researcher's own expense. To ensure confidentiality, only the researcher's desktop PC, laptop, and iPhone were used to send out and receive all forms of electronic communication to the research study's dissertation chair, prospective participants, school administrators, and any other individuals involved in the data collection process. In addition, the researcher's desktop PC and laptop were password protected, and no other individual had access to the passwords. A backup measurement used throughout the study was a 64-GB flash drive stored in the top drawer of a locked two-drawer filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. Upon completing

the dissertation, all electronic files containing confidential material used during the data collection were permanently deleted from the researcher's PC, laptop, and 64-GB flash drive.

Any printed material, which included copies of the informed consent form, preinterview questionnaire, interview questions, and documents of the approval for the study by the California Baptist University's IRB, were copied by the researcher at California Baptist University's Anne Gabriel Library, which requires a passcode to operate. All hard-copied materials related to this dissertation were secured in the bottom drawer of a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office and stored throughout the interviewing process until completion. Whether the printed material was used or unused, it was permanently destroyed at the end of the dissertation. Any hard-copied printed materials were shredded via a midsized office shredder within the researcher's home office.

Exploratory Interviews

One of the strategies used to help increase the research study's validity was conducting interviews with three participants, including academic advisors from California community colleges, implementing the Guided Pathways program within their institution's operations. During the exploratory run, each of the three participants met the required four criteria of the research study's target population but were not currently employed at either participating institution to which the data collection occurred. In addition, all three participants were based in Southern California community colleges.

By using an exploratory interview approach, the researcher was able to test the proposed interview questions (Appendix E) to determine whether each question showed

significance to the two research questions being examined in the study. In addition, through the three exploratory interviews, the researcher solicited feedback concerning the clarity of the proposed interview questions and how the researcher presented the questions.

Feedback solicited from the exploratory interviews helped the researcher maintain an appropriate tone and body language during the interview process. In addition, the exploratory participants' input provided insight to the researcher regarding the interview structure, including introductions and background information, pace, and how follow-up questions were introduced. Based on the exploratory interviews' range of times, the 45 to 60-min projected time for actual interviews was generated.

Interviews Recorded

Each one-on-one interview was video recorded via the Zoom meeting application on the researcher's laptop. Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended that regardless of when interviews are audiotaped or videotaped, a researcher should always continue to take notes, including quotes by the participant, during the interview because there is always the potential for the electronic equipment used to malfunction. After each interview, video recordings were downloaded and saved on the researcher's laptop, used, and backed up on a 64-GB flash drive, both password-protected. Each saved file was named according to the participant's alphanumeric identification and the date on which the interview was conducted.

Recordings Transcribed

To minimize the turnaround time of the overall data collection process and ensure the confidentiality of each participant, the transcribing application Otter.ai was used

instead of sending the recordings to a professional transcriber. The Otter.ai software

application took the recorded video file from each Zoom meeting and immediately

transcribed the electronic form data. All electronic copies of transcripts from the

interview were stored on the researcher's laptop and the designated backup 64-GB flash

drive. Like all other materials related to the data collection process, all transcript files

were destroyed once the dissertation process was completed.

Data Collection

One-on-one interviews were the researcher's method to collect qualitative data

about the research questions. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), interviewing

participants for qualitative data collection allows participants to provide historical

information based on the participants' own experiences. In addition, one advantage of

using the one-on-one interview process is that the researcher is "allowed to maintain

control over the line questioning" to collect data (p. 188).

Initial Steps

Upon the approval of the researcher's dissertation chair, the formality of the data

collection process began with contacting the college presidents from Institution A and

Institution B via email to get their consent for the college's participation in the study and

to recruit qualifying participants to interview for the research study (Appendix F). This

email included (a) an introduction of the researcher, (b) a brief description of the research

study and its purpose, (c) the targeted group of prospective participants, and (d) how the

data were to be collected. Once approvals by each president were secured in writing, the

researcher initiated the Institutional Review Board application process through California

Baptist University's Provost Office.

The researcher filed an Expedited Institutional Review Board application with California Baptist University's Institutional Review Board committee to collect data. Approval was granted on January 16, 2020 (Appendix G). Following California Baptist University's Institutional Review Board approval, their respective Institutional Review Board committees filed applications to research with Institution A and Institution B.

Interview Process

A solicited email was sent to all prospective participants following the IRB committee approvals from both participating institutions (Appendix A). This initial email outlined general information about the research study and its process. In addition, a copy of an informed consent form (Appendix B) signed by the participant wishing to participate in the one-on-one interview process was attached to this initial email. The informed consent form included sections outlining (a) introduction to the study, (b) what to expect, (c) risks and benefits, (d) data protection and privacy, (e) participation information, and (f) questions and contacts information.

After being informed by several prospective participants who did not scan their signed informed consent form back to the researcher, the researcher revised the initial informed consent form Word document sent to prospective participants (Appendix C). The revision to the original Word document included the following disclaimer:

> A typed signature can be used in place of a physical signature. If you wish to use this option, please note in the responding email that you wish to use this option when attaching the informed consent form Word document.

For any participant who decided to use this option, an electronic copy of the responding email with the disclaimer acknowledgment was converted to a pdf form and stored within the researcher's laptop and backup 64-GB storage flash drive.

The alphanumeric reference number was assigned to the participant upon the researcher's receipt of the signed consent form. This alphanumeric reference number was the only method of identifying each participant for the research study duration. For example, the first participant from Institution A was referenced as "A-1," and the first participant from Institution B was referenced as "B-1." Assigned alphanumeric numbers were not disclosed to the participants to ensure the confidentiality of the study.

With each confirmation of participation processed, a follow-up email was sent, including a hypothetical date and time range for the participant to select for the interview and an interview instructions information document. This document included the dissertation and research study's official title and the official assigned Institutional Review Board number for this study (Appendix H). This email was also included in the preinterview questionnaire (Appendix D), which was used to collect demographic data about each participant as reported in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, both the local and state public health authorities required both Institution A and Institution B to immediately shut down their A and Institution B on March 14, 2020; the researcher was required to change the format of the interview's structure from in-person to the virtual interview format. For all 12 interviews conducted, the video conferencing application Zoom was used. Each interviewee was sent a direct link to the Zoom meeting no less than 24 hr before the scheduled interview.

At the beginning of each Zoom meeting, the researcher explained his role as the study's principal investigator and some personal and professional background information about the researcher. Next, the researcher discussed how to convert the recording from the interview into a transcript, only making necessary edits to ensure that the participants' assigned alphanumeric reference number would be in place of their name for confidentiality reasons. Finally, interviewees were reminded that they had the opportunity to withdraw from the interview and have all information discussed during the interview omitted from the data collected at any time before the dissertation process was complete.

Once all formalities and instructions were complete, the participant had the opportunity to address any questions or concerns. When applicable, the researcher ensured that all questions or concerns were addressed to the interviewee's satisfaction before moving on, requesting the interviewee's verbal consent to record. Interviewees were asked to state, "I [name] give [inserted researcher's full name] verbal consent to record this interview."

After receiving acknowledgment, the researcher asked the first question from the established interview questions (Appendix E). Initially, each participant received a physical copy of the questions to follow during the interview, which was to be collected at the end to ensure the research's confidentiality. The researcher considered sending an electronic copy to the participant on the interview day; however, he decided to safeguard the research study's confidentiality; this option was not feasible.

Effective phenomenological study interview etiquette of (a) active listening and (b) noninterruption of participants was practiced throughout the interview process, in

which clarification of response was only asked once the participant has finished responding to the current question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, the researcher demonstrated etiquette during the interview before asking participants any clarification or follow-up questions.

Participants were reminded of their option to skip any question (or subquestion) and return to the question after the final question, ask, or skip the question altogether. During each interview, the researcher took notes to determine whether any clarification was required to a participant's response while noting critical ideologies and theories mentioned during a participant's response. Of all 12 interviews, no interviewee opted to skip a question without revisiting the question by the end of the interview.

At the end of each interview, each Zoom meeting recording was downloaded and saved on both the laptop they were conducted on and the designated backup 64-GB flash drive. Each downloaded Zoom meeting file was then transcribed through the execution of the Otter.ai transcribing application. All transcripts were reviewed, and edits were made when necessary to exclude any mentioned names. In addition, any participants' unclear responses after the transcribing process was complete were noted and exempted from further review.

Once all the interviews were completed, the research study moved on to the data analysis to identify key themes based on verbatim transcripts. Again, transcripts were analyzed, and the final key themes were determined based on the same type of language presented by most participants. Based on the data collection and observation, conclusions are reported in Chapters 4 and 5.

Data Analysis

In this research study, the data analysis method that was used was the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) method established by Moustakas (1994), which is summarized in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Modified Stevick–Colaizzi–Keen Method
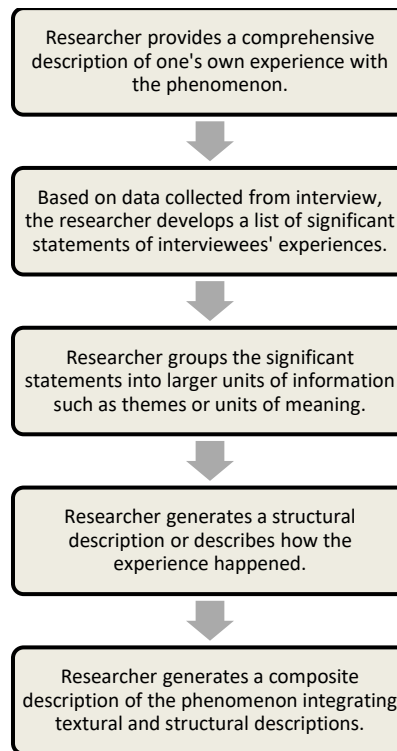
Note. Adapted from *Phenomenological Research Methods* (pp. 121-122), by C. Moustakas, 1994, Sage Publications.

Under the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, the researcher's suggestions are credited for designing a four-step process. The researcher chose this method because the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method allowed the researcher to investigate an issue he deals with regularly in his work environment but prevented the opportunity for researcher bias through his self-reflection before the data process began.

According to Moustakas (1994), each of the four steps is presented in the appropriate analysis order using a modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. The first step of the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method requires the researcher to obtain a complete description of his own experience of the phenomenon by using a phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994). For this step, the researcher considered thousands of his firsthand interactions with California community college students, including academic advisors and Guided Pathways, during the previous 2 years. These firsthand accounts included varied student-related issues, such as onboarding returning students who required immediate guidance. In addition, many concerned students who seemed lost within the community college system, unaware of a suitable major or the necessary coursework to complete that major's degree requirements.

Moustakas (1994) indicated that the researcher takes the verbatim transcript of his experience and addresses seven substeps in the second step of the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. During the first two substeps of the second step, the researcher will consider each statement made by himself or herself significantly concerning his or her description of the experience and then record all relevant comments. In this third substep of the second step, Moustakas noted how the researcher will generate a list consisting of invariant horizons (or meaning units of the experience). The invariant horizons include nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping statements from interview transcripts, which are then clustered into various themes during the fourth substep.

After the themes have been synthesized with the invariant meaning units, Moustakas (1994) stated that the researcher must transfer them into a "description of textures of the experience, including any verbatim examples where applicable" (p. 121).

Once the fifth substep is complete, there is a time of reflection during the sixth substep, which leads to constructing a "description of the structures of one's experience." Finally, with the seventh and final substep of the second step of the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, the researcher constructs a "textural-structural description" of whose meaning and essence's experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Within the second step, the researcher started the coding process. According to Saldaña (2013), the coding process refers to "qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). There were five nodes identified by the researcher: (a) failure, (b) success, (c) engagement, (d) support, and (e) barriers.

According to Moustakas (1994), under the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method's third step, each participant's verbatim transcript is reviewed through the seven-substep process. After all participants' verbatim transcripts are received and broken down within the appropriate themes generated, under the fourth step of the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, the researcher is required to construct a "composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience," which will represent the group of participants' collective experiences as a collective whole (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122).

Incorporating the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method's final two steps, the researcher finalized the participants' verbatim transcripts and highlighted significant statements related to the established nodes. Through this process, the researcher was able to generate six themes. These established six themes were based on the majority of the

participants indicating these themes within their interview question responses. A description of each of these six themes and supporting evidence through participants' statements during the interviews are presented in Chapter 4.

Design of Interview Questions

Overall, eight prominent and six subquestions were asked of each participant. Each question and subquestion asked was designed to help gather qualitative data, allowing the researcher to answer the two research questions. The following is the breakdown of each question and subquestion and their relevance to the two research questions of the study.

Interview Question 1

When reflecting on the four pillars of the Guided Pathways program, in your opinion, what is the most integral pillar and why?

The interview's first question was designed to be a generic open-ended question to start the dialogue and gather qualitative information from the participant regarding the study's primary research question. Some of the participants' responses lead to qualitative data to help answer the second research question of this study. The reactions led to a segue for the researcher to ask the second interview question.

Interview Question 2

Through your experience as an academic advisor for a Guided Pathways participating community college, do you feel that your institution adequately offers suitable pathways representative of its student population and their learning and career needs?

The second interview question was designed to collect qualitative data for the study's secondary research question by asking the participants to share their personal experience and opinions about their institutions' adequacy to represent the needs of their students. This question allowed participants to share their institution's shortcomings, barriers, successes, and the Guided Pathways program.

Interview Question 2: Subquestion 1

What are some of the typical methods that you utilize when helping connect incoming community college students transitioning from high school to potential successful pathways?

This subquestion of the second interview question was designed to gather data about the academic advisors' preferences affecting students' success within the Guided Pathways program.

Interview Question 2: Subquestion 2

Do you have a preference to employment or educational pathways? Why so?

Like the first subquestion of the second interview question, the purpose of this question was to learn academic advisors' preference for assisting students through the Guided Pathways process.

Interview Question 3

Based on your experience, are most incoming students transitioning from high school to community college adequately prepared for the Guided Pathways initiative's second pillar (i.e., Enter the Path Pillar)? Why or why not?

The third question asked participants was used to help gain data to answer the second research question. Responses could help determine any shortcomings of the

California community colleges' outreach to local high school students and the strengths of its onboarding process for incoming students.

Interview Question 3: Subquestion

How do you see your role as an academic advisor helping community college students within this pillar?

This subquestion was designed to help gather data for the primary research question because the subquestion allowed the participants to self-reflect on how their behaviors directly affect the students within the Guided Pathways program.

Interview Question 4

How do you see your role as an academic advisor contributing to the Guided Pathways program's third pillar (i.e., Stay on the Path) and community college students' continuous success through or her chosen pathway?

The fourth interview question was designed to gain insight into the self-reflection of academic advisors and their actions once the student has selected a pathway relevant to the research study's primary problem.

Interview Question 4: Subquestion 1

What are some of the roadblocks you have experienced from students?

The first subquestion was designed to identify some roadblocks that could be critical issues that needed to be addressed by California community colleges about the primary research question.

Interview Question 4: Subquestion 2

What roadblocks have you experienced from other staff, faculty, or administration?

This second subquestion was designed to identify some roadblocks that could be critical issues that needed to be addressed by California community colleges about the secondary research question.

Interview Question 5

Although the Guided Pathways' fourth pillar (i.e., Ensure Learning) might be considered more classroom/instructional based, what type of accountability do you hold for yourself in regard to community college students and their overall success within the classroom?

This question was designed to collect data about the primary research question; the fifth question aimed to discover the different levels of accountability that the participants held themselves to regarding the success of the community college students they advise through the Guided Pathways model's final pillar.

Interview Question 6

Now that AB 705 has been implemented into the California community college system, in your opinion, has it helped or hindered the ideals of California's Guided Pathways initiative? How so?

The sixth question was designed to get qualitative data to help the researcher answer the study's secondary research question. In addition, the data collected could identify critical issues that need to be addressed by California community colleges.

Interview Question 6: Subquestion

How has AB 705 changed your role and thinking as an academic advisor for incoming community college students transiting from high school?

This subquestion was designed to gather information from each participant that could be used to answer both research questions. The behavior-related experiences shared were used for the primary research question. In contrast, AB 705 answered the second research question about how the institutions changed policy.

Interview Question 7

When reflecting on your experience with the Guided Pathways program so far, if allowed to change (i.e., add, delete, or expand), one of the four pillars is to improve the program and its overall success rates within the California community college system. Why?

The seventh interview question was to amass additional data that the researcher could use to answer primary and secondary questions. In addition, the researcher asked for further clarification on the subject matter in any situation when participant responses were previously noted in the interview.

Interview Question 8

Theorist Michael Lipsky has referred to some public/civil servants as "street-level bureaucrats" as they are those who work directly with the public and are often given some sort of "degree of discretion" when it comes to enforcing the rules, laws, and policies to which they are assigned to uphold. When considering your role as an academic advisor, would you identify yourself as a "street-level bureaucrat" when making decisions for students within the Guided Pathways program? Why or why not?

This final question of the interview was to determine whether the academic advisors being interviewed thought of themselves as street-level bureaucrats and, if so, how this identifier would affect the decision making they make with their students and

their success with the Guided Pathways program as referenced in the primary question of the study.

Limitations

Provided the chosen design of this research study, the researcher understood that there was potential for some limitations to occur, which were identified as the following:

1. The research study has limitations based on the sample size of the sampling method chosen. The sample size was taken from institutions representing only 10% of all California community colleges currently participating in the California Pathways Project and 116 California community colleges implementing the Guided Pathways program within their institution's structure. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other California community colleges (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014).

2. The research study has limitations based on the selected California community colleges being restricted by being solely located within the Southern California region.

3. The research study has limitations based on the researcher's potential for personal biases because of the researcher's selected instrumentation method. For example, one or more of the participant's responses skewed because of the structure of the one-on-one interview, question(s) asked during the interview, or the researcher's demeanor. This action could have led to participants withholding in-depth responses or potentially providing falsified information when responding to specific questions.

4. The research study has limitations based on each California community college's diversity in retrospect to its culture and structure. As a result of such differences, there are limitations to replicating the research study and establishing inferences from the sample's data correlated to the general target population identified in the study (Creswell, 2013).

Summary

Chapter 3 described the methodology of this research study. The chapter began with the restatement of the research study's purpose and questions, leading to a chosen qualitative-based phenomenological research design. Next, the chapter identified and outlined the research study population and sample and explained the data collection process and analysis procedures used. Finally, the chapter reviewed the limitations of this research study. In Chapter 4, the findings and analysis are presented from the data collected from the research study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the study's purpose statement and the research questions. Next, the research methods and data collection procedures, including the SCK method, lead to six uniquely identified themes derived from an analytical review of interviewees' transcripts. Finally, the chapter concludes with a detailed explanation of each theme, including but not limited to direct quotes from the study's participants to provide additional clarity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perspectives of academic advisors who are servicing the needs of students within the California community colleges participating in the Guided Pathways initiative. In addition, the study sought to provide a detailed understanding of the perceptions of (a) the academic advisor's role in the community college meeting the goals outlined by the California Guided Pathways initiative and (b) the community college's role in affecting the success rate of students enrolled in the Guided Pathways-based programs.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions for this study:

Primary Research Question: From an academic advisor's (i.e., counselor and educational advisor) perspective, what role does the advisor play in California community colleges' ability to meet the goals outlined by the California Guided Pathways initiative?

Secondary Research Question: From an academic advisor's perspective, what are the

critical issues California community colleges need to address to increase student success

in California Guided Pathways-based programs?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

Emails soliciting participation in the research study from Institution A and

Institution B academic advisors were sent on the week of June 15, 2020, and participants

were to be interviewed between June 19, 2020, and August 14, 2020. A second solicited

email for prospective participants was sent during the week of July 26, 2020. Once an

interested participant returned the signed informed consent form, a reply email to the

individual was sent with the preinterview questionnaire document used to collect

demographical data and an interview instructions information document for the

participant to review. In addition, this same email included a set of interview dates and

time options for the participant. After each participant confirmed the date and time, a

formal invitation to the Zoom meeting was sent to the participant with the appropriate

link and passcode required for the meeting.

Between Institution A and Institution B, 55 academic advisors met all

requirements to be interviewed for the study. Of the eligible 55 participants, 12

participants completed all the necessary preinterview steps, as exhibited in Table 1.

Of the 12 participants in this study, five of 12 participants were from Institution

A, and seven of the 12 participants were from Institution B, as exhibited in Table 2.

Before starting each interview, the researcher explained his duties as the

interviewer/principal investigator, shared background information about himself and the

study, and ensured the participant's confidentiality throughout the dissertation process.

Each participant had the opportunity to ask questions about the interview process or the study itself at the beginning and end of the interview. Before the first question, each participant was asked to consent to video record the interview verbally.

Table 1

Participants Interviewed From Overall Availability

Eligible academic advisors	*n*	%
Interviewed	12	21.8
Not interviewed	55	78.2

Table 2

Participants by Institution

Baseline characteristic	*n*	*%*
Institution A	5	41.7
Institution B	7	58.3

Once each interview concluded and the participant left the meeting room, the recording function was stopped, and the audio and video were downloaded to the researcher's laptop. This laptop was used for each Zoom session and saved in a new folder named by the interview date and the alphanumeric number assigned to the participant. Each file was backed up onto the external 64-GB flash drive. Using the Otter.ai transcription application compatible with Zoom files, transcripts were converted into digital format and edited. The interviewee's name was mentioned during the transcript; the participant's name was removed and replaced with the participant's assigned alphanumeric reference number. All transcripts were backed up onto the same

external 64-GB flash drive, and hard copies of notes and edited transcripts were kept in the locked filing cabinet.

After each transcript was combined with notes taken during the interview, responses to the eight questions (and subquestions) were summarized. This summarized information was then transported onto a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with critical answers to each question posted in a table. Each table was named in correspondence to the participant's assigned alphanumeric. Finally, cumulative analysis of all the participants' responses was generated at the end of the file, noting reoccurring responses by those interviewed to find the correlation.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Demographic Data

Once the researcher received a signed consent form from the prospective participant during the data collection process, a preinterview questionnaire containing five questions (Appendix D) was sent in the follow-up email to gather demographic information from each individual. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), there are benefits for a researcher to obtain demographic information from those interviewed from their sample size because the researcher can garner a deeper understanding of their study's sample.

The five demographic questions asked in the preinterview questionnaire collected information on each participant's type of academic advisor, experience as an academic advisor in the California community college system, the highest level of education, the average range of interactions with students per academic year, and the average time spent

with each student per academic year. Participants were asked to return their

questionnaires to the researcher before their scheduled interview.

Based on the demographic information from the preinterview questionnaire, most

of the participants from the two institutions (seven of the 12 participants) identified

themselves as educational advisors. No participants identified as both educational

advisors and academic counselors. As illustrated in Table 3, the range of years of

experience as an academic advisor varied. Most participants fell between 1-3 and 4-7

years of experience. Four of the five participants from Institution A and five of the seven

participants from Institution B identified within the specified ranges.

According to the participant's demographic information, all 12 participants

achieved a bachelor's degree. As previously noted, those identified as academic

counselors must have at least a master's degree because the position is considered a

faculty position. Educational advisor positions are regarded as classified employment

positions at both institutions requiring an associate's degree although a bachelor's degree

is highly desired for prospective job applicants.

Based on questionnaire responses, most participants (nine of 12) from both

institutions were identified to be within the two higher ranges of students serviced in an

academic year. The disparity in the range can be attributed to some participants being

assigned to specific students and others given to the general student population.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Baseline characteristic	*n*	%
Gender		
Female	7	58.3
Male	5	41.7
Years of experience (range)		
1-3	4	33.3
4-7	5	41.7
8-10	2	16.7
10+	1	8.3
Type of academic advisor		
Educational advisor	7	58.3
Counselor	5	41.7
Educational level (degree)		
Associate's	0	0
Bachelor's	3	25.0
Master's	9	75.0
Doctoral	0	0.0
Specialized area		
Yes	2	16.7
No	10	83.3
Average caseload of students per academic year (range)		
0-250	2	16.7
251-500	2	16.7
501-1,000	4	33.3
1,000+	4	33.3
Average time with each student per academic year (range)		
0-15 minutes	0	0.0
16-30 minutes	0	0.0
31-45 minutes	2	16.7
46-60 minutes	4	33.3
60+ minutes	6	50.0

All 12 participants indicated that they spend more than 30 min with the students they interact with during an academic year. Those participants who stated they were academic counselors represented the two within the 31-45-min range. The remaining 10 participants represented educational advisors who spent 46-60 or 60+ min on average with students they interacted with in an academic year. Note the following narratives have been truncated and summarized (see Appendix I for full narratives).

Participant Introductions

Participant A-1's Narrative

Participant A-1 has been an educational advisor for approximately 8 years but has worked for various student support service departments for over 20 years at Institution A. He currently holds a master's degree and is debating whether to continue his education for a doctoral degree. In addition to his role as an education advisor for the LHSS Pathways, Participant A-1 is an adjunct professor at Institution A with the Political Science department.

Participant A-2's Narrative

Participant A-2 is relatively new in her role as an educational advisor with only 1 year of experience but has worked for various student support service departments at Institution A for over 20 years. She holds a master's degree and had no desire to continue her education at the time of the interview. Participant A-2 has been teaching as an adjunct professor for Institution A for 2 years with the Business and Information Systems Technology (BIST) department.

Participant A-3's Narrative

Participant A-3 has spent approximately 6 years in his current role as an educational advisor but has held many different positions at Institution A for over 10 years. He is currently pursuing his master's degree and plans to teach at Institution A upon completion.

Participant A-4's Narrative

Participant A-4 just completed her third year as a counselor and has been with Institution A for 5 years. She currently holds a master's degree but has no plans to continue her education. However, because of her classification as a faculty member, she teaches guidance courses for first-time and first-year students at Institution A.

Participant A-5's Narrative

Participant A-5 has been in her current position as a counselor for approximately 5 years at Institution A. According to Participant A5, "when the time is right," she would like to pursue a PhD or EdD and possibly go into academic management. As a faculty member, she teaches different guidance courses at Institution A.

Participant B-1's Narrative

Participant B-1 has been a STEM Pathways counselor for over 2 years at Institution B and has previous experience within student support service-related departments at other California community colleges. She holds a master's degree and is pursuing her EdD in Organizational Change and Administration. In addition, she must teach guidance courses at Institution B each semester as a faculty member.

Participant B-2's Narrative

Participant B-2 has been in his role as an educational advisor for 4 years at Institution B but also has another 4 years of experience at previous California community colleges. He holds a bachelor's degree and is pursuing his master's degree in education. Upon completing his master's degree, Participant B-2 hopes to begin teaching at Institution B.

Participant B-3's Narrative

Participant B-3 has been a counselor for approximately 5 years and has been in the California community college system for over 10 years. He has a master's degree and is researching potential Ph.D. programs to start soon. In addition, Participant B-3 now instructs various guidance courses at Institution B and sometimes at surrounding community high schools in partnerships with Institution B.

Participant B-4's Narrative

Participant B-4 has been an educational advisor for 4 years at Institution B but has over 7 years of experience at two other California community colleges. She currently holds a master's degree and has not planned to further her education. Therefore, participant B-4 had no desire to pursue teaching at the community college level at the time of the interview.

Participant B-5's Narrative

Participant B-5 has been an educational advisor for over 4 years with Institution B and has 3 years' experience with student support services at Institution B. He plans on continuing his master's degree coursework shortly. However, Participant B-5 is unsure

whether he would like to pursue teaching after completing his master's degree or seek a doctoral degree program in higher education leadership or administration.

Participant B-6's Narrative

Participant B-6 has been a counselor for 4 years at Institution B but has over 10 years' experience at California community colleges in different areas. She is currently looking to pursue another master's degree and eventually a PhD in psychology. Participant B-6 teaches guidance courses at both Institution B and at another community college in the online format.

Participant B-7's Narrative

Participant B-7 has been an educational advisor for approximately 3 years at Institution B and has over 5 years of additional experience in student support services at California community colleges. She recently earned her master's degree and planned on continuing her education after a 1- to 2-year break from her schooling. During her vacation in studies, she hopes to start teaching as an adjunct professor at Institution B or another California community college.

<div align="center">

Executive Summary of Interview Narratives

</div>

Nodes Analyzed

According to Saldaña (2013),

In qualitative data analysis, a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes or 'translates' data and thus attributes interpreted the meaning of each datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, assertion or proposition development, theory building, and other analytical processes. (p. 4)

As mentioned in Chapter 3, five nodes emerged. The five nodes were (a) failure, (b) success, (c) engagement, (d) support, and (e) barriers.

Failure was the code used when a participant mentioned instances of shortcomings, nonperformance, inconsistencies, or missed opportunities from either an individual or educational institution's perspective. Success was the code used when a participant mentioned achievements reached, encouragement, progression, or accomplishments from an operational and individual perspective. Engagement was the code used when a participant mentioned establishing relationships, trust, bonds, or connections with students they advise. Support was the code used when a participant talked about obtaining resources (both monetary and nonmonetary) from a student– student, student–parent, student, advisor, advisor–college, and college–administration perspective. Finally, barriers was the code used when a participant mentioned roadblocks, hurdles, and other obstacles both student and academic advisors face that affect their academic progression.

The researcher analyzed the five nodes from the 12 participants' points of view. By analyzing the nodes, the researcher generated a narrative from each of the 12 participants, including exact quotes from each participant's interview (see Tables 4-15). Each participant's narratives helped identify this study's six themes, which are discussed later in this chapter.

Table 4

Participant A-1's Significant Statements in Relations to Nodes

Nodes	Significant statements
Failure	Some of the responsibility of the student's unpreparedness comes from the public school system the student graduates from. … For many, failure is a regular occurrence in their everyday life. … So, I try to detour students from believing this negative way of thinking.
Success	The thought of success is a mindset that most of our students do not have when entering our college. … Try to encourage them that they can be successful in their studies if they set aside the proper time each week.
Engagement	Do not always benefit from spending as much time as we need to establish a connection without our students, which reflects the results. … My engagement with the student begins when they walk in and out that door.
Support	Evidence has shown that the lack of support from one's home front can hinder the student's progress. … I want my students to know that they could rely on me for support anytime at a minimum.
Barriers	A significant number of students' parents' inability to speak English presents a roadblock to their child's academic success. … There are roadblocks created within our organization and higher-up authority that poses a problem to the students moving on.

Table 5

Participant A-2's Significant Statements in Relations to Nodes

Nodes	Significant statements
Failure	Ignore the students who contribute to the student's failure within the classroom … need to take accountability instead of looking the other direction.
Success	The elements of success at the community college are presented to them at the high school level. … I try to point out they can be the first to succeed in college in their family … setting an example for their brothers and sisters.
Engagement	Students will be pacing outside my area. … I will take the initiative to introduce myself and start what I hope is a long-term relationship with that student. … Sometimes, I wish I had just a few more minutes with each student.
Support	All of the support mechanisms are here at the college for our students. … Unfortunately, most do not know how to access them. … Present them with a student resource cheat sheet as reference … update that sheet regularly.
Barriers	Does not help when the roadblocks come within our department … these barriers only hurt the student's progress. … Contradictory information can present unnecessary roadblocks for our students and their chosen pathway.

Table 6

Participant A-3's Significant Statements in Relations to Nodes

Nodes	Significant statements
Failure	I try to help the student believe in their abilities. … Failure is not an option. … Instill that we can build and learn from the failures we experience.
Success	I try to highlight student success within my area … making connections between past and present students. … Internal conflicts only distract our college's goal of student success within their pathways.
Engagement	I liked to continuously be engaged with all of my students, whether it is an email or a quick phone call to check in. ... Lucky to have more time than most when it comes to meeting one-on-one with my students … Shows with retention levels.
Support	Experiencing support from your peers trickles down to a point where students can make a common connection, directly affecting our students who sometimes observe such behavior firsthand.
Barriers	Family members who are nonsupportive can be extreme roadblocks for our students. … Not being prepared for the transition from high school to community college has a huge backstepping effect on our incoming students.

Table 7

Participant A-4's Significant Statements in Relations to Nodes

Nodes	Significant statements
Failure	We often fail the students before they start their first semester. … One example is from an onboarding perspective. … Not having a clear understanding of what they want to study while in college or what they want to do beyond college can have its drawbacks … The longer they have this uncertainty, the higher the probability of failure.
Success	Forget that the success stories at other community colleges do not necessarily mean that the results will be automatic at our college. … Our student success plan should start at the high schools before they graduate. ... Seem to be tossed over to us.
Engagement	That first meeting with incoming students is so important … first opportunity to engage with student and build a relationship. … Formal approach is not the best solution. … Informal approach technics are more inviting in establishing that relationship goal.
Support	Most of our students do not have a strong support system. … So, I advocate them that I will be that support they need. … Internal support from the different areas of my college is correlational to the support I can promote to my students.
Barriers	One of the biggest setbacks of our incoming students is how indecisive they are going into our first meeting. … The longer they remain, the longer they remain out of our college.

Table 8

Participant A-5's Significant Statements in Relations to Nodes

Nodes	Significant statements
Failure	Taxpayers want to blame our community college system. … Blame the K-12 public school system. … Unbalance of student caseloads helps contribute to our students' failures … continuing problem that needs to be addressed at our college and state [California] level.
Success	If our students had the ability to choose a pathway before their first semester, our retention and completion success rating would reflect accordingly. … To harp on the K-12 public school system, but they need to work with us for the sake of our student's future academic plans.
Engagement	My large caseload affects my opportunity to meet with students face-to-face … use other options for communication to show I care. … In my opinion, connecting with the student plays a role in whether that student sinks or sails that first year.
Support	Support does not always result in guaranteed success. … However, the acknowledgment of support demonstrates to the student that they are not alone. … Often as a counselor, I experience that I am the first type of support the student has ever had in all the years of their schooling.
Barriers	Students can be their biggest roadblock or obstacle … as they constantly doubt themselves. … Having a true onboarding process in place would be beneficial to overcoming the consistent roadblock with our typical students and not being prepared upon arriving at our community college.

Table 9

Participant B-1's Significant Statements in Relations to Nodes

Nodes	Significant statements
Failure	What I witnessed at that training opened my eyes to the conflict that affects our students. … I try not to use the word failure but rather tell my students that they might experience setbacks from which they can learn and move forward.
Success	If you can get these kids to understand success is within their grasp … a better chance of them succeeding in and out of the classroom. … Studies have shown that student success at colleges and universities are connected to the nucleus of support they get from home. … Unfortunately, most of our community college students do not have that luxury.
Engagement	During that first meeting with a student, I try not to overwhelm them with more information, so they will likely feel comfortable opening up during our next encounter. … Continuous communication is a must with our students … even if they do not take the time to reply to each time I reach out.
Support	Administration needs to help support its counselors and educational advisors who deal with the general public. ... The difference of the number of students responsible fluctuates noticeably. … For Guided Pathways to work as they [the State] want it to work, there needs to be an increase in financial support to all students and not just specific groups.
Barriers	Policies or encouraged suggestions put in place can result in roadblocks for our student's progression through their pathway of choice. … Difference in caseload can present a barrier for student success too…do not get the benefit of a lot of time with their counselor or educational advisor, resulting in negative consequences for the student.

Table 10

Participant B-2's Significant Statements in Relations to Nodes

Nodes	Significant statements
Failure	Right now, students are set up to fail before they even begin at the community college level … back to their time spent in high school. … When we cannot respect each other and what each of us does for our students … fail our community, our taxpayers, and their investments in our students.
Success	Guided Pathways allows students to visualize their road to success at our community college within a given timeframe. … A portion of the responsibilities needed for student success should be attached to these kids coming in. … They want to be treated like adults but are indecisive with most of their decisions.
Engagement	Times where I experienced internal issues at my college I have become disengaged with my work.… Unfortunately resulted in disengagement with students that I cannot get back. … Make an effort to engage students immediately who did poorly during their first academic semester … Look for options to end the year with a successful semester and for the student to build confidence.
Support	Can be related to the lack of support that majority of our students do not have … Look for opportunities for other support within surrounding community to offset the support they might not get at home. … There is no denying that the influence one's support has on one's success … comes at no financial cost to the supporting party but rather at the cost of time.
Barriers	Kids come from homes where English is not the primary language…along with parents' reluctance creates these unnecessary barriers that students need to overcome amongst their other challenges in college. … Those of authority inadvertently create these roadblocks for us [academic advisor] that present new opportunities for students to be discouraged because of what might seem like unit overload.

Table 11

Participant B-3's Significant Statements in Relations to Nodes

Nodes	Significant statements
Failure	The failure of having a college-wide established onboarding process hurts our students … assist with the difficulty of these kids transitioning from high school to college just months after graduating. … We [academic advisors] should not be the ones who have others point their finger at for our students' failures … finger of responsibility should be directed to their high school guidance counselors first.
Success	If our college can create a solid onboarding process … student retention and students graduating with degree or certificate will increase to the targeted goal of our college. … The different targets that our college aims for in student success centers around the better management of dispersing caseloads more evening and not favorably for others.
Engagement	Going over all the pathways with the student can be time-consuming and too much information for a 30-minute session … spend a good portion of the first meeting going through informal introductions. … If I had a smaller caseload of students, I would have the ability to spend more time with each student face-to-face … also allow me to focus on struggling students.
Support	Guided Pathways gives the support student need to map out their graduation from beginning to finish. … I will help support them by preparing them along the pathways as they move forward to that end goal. … Mean to be redundant, but creating an onboarding system that works will provide that student the support required so they will not feel so clueless when they have that first meeting with me.
Barriers	Our students, unfortunately, created barriers because they do not realize they have options … will make self-made decisions without any advice, which often results in consequences. … High schools not preparing their students for college is a common roadblock I have seen … Instead, it seems they have just given them that diploma and their best wishes on whatever they decided to post-high school.

Table 12

Participant B-4's Significant Statements in Relations to Nodes

Nodes	Significant statements
Failure	And yet we tell our students this is a requirement for registration, and then students do not meet with an academic advisor until they are one semester in and already struggling, if not failing. … When we argue about disagreements in advising in the presence of students, we fail the students…lose their trust with us as advisors and the college.
Success	Overall, I feel that we have implemented Guided Pathways effectively into our college … Students who I have advised have shown success in their first year when they have been able to select a pathway. … To prepare incoming students for success properly, we need to create better relationships with our community high schools … make sure respective academic advisors are on the same page.
Engagement	Many students come back to me when they are unsure about what they should do … satisfying to know that I am someone they can confine with and ask for advice regularly. … Unfortunately, I have seen some of my colleagues that do not care to engage with their students…they see students by merely their student identification numbers and not by name, which is disheartening.
Support	Going to support the students fully I am advising; I need to understand my job responsibilities better, so I do not overstep boundaries and get into conflict with others over a misunderstanding. … For us [academic advisors] to support our students to the best of our abilities, we need to be given the same effort of support from our managers and colleagues, especially as a college are not getting desired results.
Barriers	Students not understanding what Guided Pathways has been a barrier that I have commonly seen … leave high school without knowing what they want to study in college, let alone select a pathway. … Not having the home support also is a common barrier for our students … pressured to drop out of college to help out the family with financial matters or help out around the household.

Table 13

Participant B-5's Significant Statements in Relations to Nodes

Nodes	Significant statements
Failure	Because my boss did not outline my responsibilities to the students when I first took on this position, I provided some advice that I would not give today, and I failed many students sadly. … How can we expect anything more from our students when we fail to provide them with a legit onboarding process … under the current process, we rush them through the student registration process and wash our hands.
Success	The design of Guided Pathways is to maximize the success of our students…job is to help the student make the connection to the path and guide them through the start to the finish line. … Never a better moment when a student thanks you for being part of their success story because you can now share that story with others to continue promoting student success.
Engagement	Critical is that first meeting between the incoming student and me, because as they say, "you never get an opportunity to make a second impression," you need to establish trust. … Even though the Guided Pathways may map out a student's academic journey … many will stray off that path without our guidance or assistance.
Support	I like to send out motivational messages periodically to my students … let them know I am there to support and think of them and believe in them and their academic and life goals. … Many employed at our college need to learn how to support each other instead of being mean and unethical … might not be teaching in the classroom, but we are the ones that get the students there.
Barriers	Majority of our students come directly from high school because they have a sense of uncertainty about what to do with their lives. … These uncertainties can turn into roadblocks in life and college. … Do not realize that their disagreements generate another hurdle that a student might not be ready to handle, which can lead to the student looking for a detour and leaving our college.

Table 14

Participant B-6's Significant Statements in Relations to Nodes

Nodes	Significant statements
Failure	Failure does not only occur at the end of the semester when grades are published … Students can pass all of their classes and still drop out because we [college] forgot to notice their existence. … To share a personal experience with failure that a student might be able to relate to, and how I overcame that failure and tried to collaborate with the student about his or her options moving forward.
Success	As a counselor, I like to point out every little success that the student experiences … something as simply passing a math exam can give the student motivation for continued success in that class and other classes. … The problem is that we expect success from our students as a college without teaching them to achieve that success … just because there are links to online college resources does not constitute student success.
Engagement	The difference between me and others in my position regarding student engagement is that I do not clock out when my schedule time off. ... If the student is up studying, I am responding to student emails. … Firsthand experience has taught me that when you engage with students, they tend to share those experiences with friends and classmates at the college, which leads to others coming in for advice.
Support	As much support I provide the students under my guidance, other parts of the college need to deliver when it comes to supporting. … The problem is that others who do not support like to take credit still. … Sacramento wants continued results, but at the current student growth rate, the community colleges need more advisors. … Funding for just a few more advisors at each college would show a worthy ROI.
Barriers	Certain programs look good on paper but can backfire to hinder the same students the program was intended on helping … then those who implemented the process will come back and ask why it didn't work. … AB 705 was probably one of the more recent pieces of legislation beneficial to most of our student demographic. … It helps many students get over that hurdle of seemingly endless remedial classes.

Table 15

Participant B-7's Significant Statements in Relations to Nodes

Nodes	Significant statements
Failure	There needs to be consistency in our roles and responsibilities as advisors. … Because of changes and increased workload during intersessions, I had less time with my regulars. … Baffles me that students can earn a high school diploma and have no idea what to do when they arrive at our college's doorsteps, directly reflecting their high school's failure to care.
Success	One of the most difficult tasks as an academic advisor is to have students grasp what it takes to succeed in college versus high school. … D's can get you a diploma but not a college degree. … Since many of these kids are still dependent on their parents, as academic advisors, we have to "win over" their parents and recognize their role in their child's success in college.
Engagement	Having to deal with the ongoing issues of an increased workload and trying to meet the needs of each of the students I advise has affected how I would like to build a relationship. … The success of the Guided Pathways program corresponds with our ability to make a bond with the student. … Losing time each semester with each student only harms that opportunity from happening.
Support	Incoming high school students need the largest amount of support than our college's other students. … Even though most can work wonders on their cell phones, they can navigate our website. … Others just want to show as minimal support as possible, and 'pass the buck' to others at the college which is not fair to the students.
Barriers	The level of unpreparedness of our recent high school graduates is the most ordinary roadblock that I am used to seeing. … Until we have a better onboarding system, it is my job to help them a breakthrough. … Other academic advisors can be responsible for unintentionally generating roadblocks for student success, even though they will disagree when confronted on the subject matter.

Six Final Themes Established

Taking the verbatim transcripts of the 12 interviews conducted, the researcher extracted approximately 452 meaningful statements. When organizing the participants' significant comments about the prospective eight themes, the researcher looked for theme representation through the number of words dedicated to each theme and given by most participants. Any themes in which six or fewer participants expressed vocalization were withdrawn for further analysis. This process of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method led to the participants' finalization of six final themes and their corresponding descriptions, which are exhibited in Table 16.

Each of the final themes was selected based on the majority of the participants (minimum seven of 12) and ranked based on the total number of participants who spoke about each final theme and the associated number of words taken from the participants' transcript verbatim. Furthermore, Table 17 outlines each ranking of final themes and corresponding totals.

Theme 1: Students Unprepared/Indecisiveness

One of the biggest challenges for academic advisors when dealing with incoming high school students transitioning into the California community college system is their unpreparedness and indecisiveness before entering their first academic year. California, which has the most extensive community college system in the nation, has continually seen that most incoming students from high school require remedial classes and often are reluctant to seek help, resulting in them quietly dropping out (Esch, 2009). This uncertainty and unawareness of new students often present unique challenges for academic advisors who assist students in choosing an appropriate pathway while also

assessing the student's ability to perform at the college level based on minimal information.

Table 16

Final Six Themes and Descriptions

Final themes	Description
Students unprepared/ indecisiveness	Pertains to incoming community college students transitioning from high school undecided about short-term and long-term educational goals for which academic advisors seek guidance.
Disparities in student caseload	Quantitative variances in the number of students each academic advisor is responsible for advising during a full academic school year.
Internal conflict	Refers to the conflict within an organization that can be detrimental to academic advisors and guiding students toward pathways and success.
Onboarding	Deals from when community colleges first approach prospective students to the beginning of the same students' first academic semester involve interaction with academic advisors.
Unclarity of responsibilities	Unclear expectations of academic advisors based on job responsibilities and others throughout the organization's structure.
Administrative/government intervention	Consisting of rules, policies, and passed legislation by higher education management and California state agencies that directly/indirectly affect academic advisors' decision-making process.

Table 17

Final Six Themes and Occurrence

Final themes	Participants	Relevance (words)
Students unpreparedness/indecisiveness	11	2,493
Disparities in student caseload	11	2,744
Internal conflict	10	1,988
Onboarding	10	1,937
Unclarity of responsibilities	9	1,795
Administrative/government intervention	9	1,658

Participant A-1. Participant A-1 discussed the ongoing problem of unprepared students each academic year.

> We do not have the luxury of having most incoming students as prepared as other students of the same demographic who attend UC or CSU colleges. Every once in a while, we might get a few students who are and decide to follow our community college because of a lack of scholarships, grants, or other necessary funding to attend those 4-year schools. Most of our incoming high school students who attend our community college are here because they do not know their long-term plans and hope that something might spark some interest in the classes after taking some classes, which helps contribute to the current problem.

Participant A-2. Participant A-2 mentioned how most students who attend events held by her department are often unaware of any direction:

> Events in my department often include students who have attended at least one semester of community college yet have no idea where they want to go or how to

get there. So they decide what direction they want to go. The student has a

specific misconception that we, as academic advisors, will make their career path

and decisions, which is inaccurate.

Participant A-3. Participant A-3 expressed his concerns about student

unpreparedness of students even with the college resources provided:

Our college offers several events, seminars, and workshops for incoming students

and their parents to help prepare them before that first semester. However, the

problem is that these incoming class members never knew how to be a student in

high school, and they often come in with the expectation that they will

automatically be one once they enter our college. Yet, at the same time, the truth

is that they are not prepared and have no idea where to start.

Participant A-4. Participant A-4 talked about how incoming students are

typically indecisive by the time they have their first encounter:

Often, I will serve as the student if they have any ideas on what they would like

to study to draw out a game plan for their first academic year. Even though I have

their assessment results and ask them questions to gauge whether or not adding

math or English class is feasible, I often get the "I do not know the response." I

want them to succeed and do not want to put them in courses that discourage

them; when they answer with "I guess" or "I suppose," it honestly scares me.

Participant A-5. Participant A-5 discussed being in similar situations with

incoming first-year community college students and their indecisiveness:

Each semester there are a group of first-year students who I deal with who will

change their course schedule multiple times within that first semester and wind up

coming to me in an attempt to fix their dilemma. When I question why they made

so many changes to their schedule, common responses refer back to how they just

assigned what classes they needed to graduate high school. They were unaware

they could plan a program with people like me at the college, so they just picked

random classes.

Participant B-2. Participant B-2 believes that the high schools are often to blame

for the students being preprepared for the transition to community college:

I like to be optimistic that with each year, the new incoming students will be more

prepared and have a basic understanding of what is expected with them entering

that first year of college. However, each year shocked to learn that many students

feel that their high schools fail to prepare them appropriately for community

college and feel as if the high school wants to wash their hands of any

responsibility. The students are the victims, and we, advisors, have a more

difficult job.

Participant B-3. Participant B-3 shared similar experiences of unprepared and

indecisive students and connection to the lack of involvement of their high schools:

When speaking with first-year students and discussing potential paths, I am

perplexed how many never recall seeing any of the resources we provided their

high schools. These are often located outside their guidance counselor's office

and other designated areas for college information resources. For example, many

have expressed that they had to complete a career assessment test, but past the

results, no one at the high school helped point out how many community colleges

like ours could assist them in their career path.

Participant B-4. During the interview, Participant B-4 recalled how a typical student's background often factors into their unpreparedness regardless of the available resources accessible to the student and their support system:

No matter how much information we provide on our website or with the pamphlets and brochures that we provide to high school and community events that we put on, most of the students who I deal with are not where we want them to be going into their first semester. With our college's student demographic being majority Hispanic or Mexican American, it is widespread that our students are first-generation college students and have the potential to be the first in their families to graduate college. However, because of language barriers or having parents who cannot support them like other students, these students are disadvantaged and unprepared.

Participant B-5. Participant B-5 opened up about his frustrations regarding students and their unpreparedness and indecisiveness:

What makes the situation more difficult for advisors is that these students often will avoid meeting with us and instead try to handle making course selection choices, which usually ends with the student being put on academic probation. So how do most of our incoming students not know about the benefits of meeting with their advisors when all the literature is at their disposal that continually points our way?

Participant B-6. Similar to Participant B-4's testimony, Participant B-6 discussed how language barriers often contributed to the incoming typical student's unpreparedness and indecisiveness that she deals with:

Most of the students I advise annually come from homes where English is not the primary language. These students might not be ESL students but struggle because of their parent's inability to properly assist them with any decision making for college or guide them to the college's resources. Instead of coming to an advisor like me, these students will rely on their peers in the same situation, which is a disaster for both the students and their peers.

Participant B-7. According to Participant B-7, a student's unpreparedness and indecisiveness are difficult when guiding them to an appropriate pathway:

We abandoned the cafeteria approach for students and class selection to make it easier for students to visualize and map their pathways. But the problem is that because the students do not know what they want to study or any potential careers they wish to pursue, it feels like we have not made any progress and are stuck in the cafeteria.

Theme 2: Disparities in Student Caseload

One of the most significant demands academic advisors repeatedly confront each academic year is effectively managing their student caseload (Mair, 2016). This situation was evident based on the responses of the academic advisors interviewed. Of the participants interviewed, 11 of the 12 academic advisors mentioned the disparity in student caseload as a potential roadblock or barrier when assisting students.

Participant A-1. Participant A-1 shared about his experience of having expectations by management to garner the same level of student success rates as other academic advisors who are given a significant lower caseload of students:

In my experience, one of the biggest challenges I have had as an advisor is that I

have always had one of the more significant caseloads of students compared to

some of my colleagues. Some of my advisor colleagues are only responsible for a

fraction of the number of students I have. Still, as a whole, we are expected to

contribute equally to our college's overall student success. Realistically, how am

I supposed to get the same results when I deal with potentially over 1,000 students

each year, and some of my colleagues only have no more than 100 each semester?

Participant A-2. Participant A-2 discussed how the difference in caseload

between other colleagues could be discouraging:

Being new as an academic advisor and dealing with an unknown student caseload

each year is very difficult. Unlike many of my colleagues, the fluctuation of my

caseload changes daily, and I have to advise students from specialized areas and

the general population while still meeting the expectations of my colleagues with

a significantly lesser caseload. In addition, each new student that comes to my

office means less time than I have with my other existing students.

Participant A-3. Even though Participant A-3 has a smaller caseload compared to

other nonspecialized academic advisors, he understands how the differences in caseloads

of advisors affect the students:

 I am aware that my caseload is not as heavy as others; even with my smaller

caseload, I am faced with challenges that can be time-consuming. So, considering

the potential of my caseload doubling or tripling would be detrimental to the time

I would allocate to each student. When considering that some students require

more time than others, losing that time could negatively affect the relationship between that student and me.

Participant A-4. Like Participant A-3, Participant A-4 had one of the smaller caseloads at Institution A but did not necessarily feel she had enough time to advise her students properly:

Many incoming students I meet with are indecisive about what avenue or pathway they want to choose academically, so I have to spend more time with them. But between the classes I teach and the other school commitments that I currently have, I never seem to have enough time that I would ideally like to have with each of my students.

Participant A-5. Because of having a more extensive caseload of students, Participant A-5 discussed the effort levels required to get caught up with students:

Due to the general student population, my caseload has averaged over 1,000 students in the last 3 years and is expected to grow. Management discourages us from taking our work home with us, but sometimes working extra hours from home is the only way to send follow-up emails and responses to students. If I depended on the hours, I would be physically at the school, and many students would feel neglected.

Participant B-1. Participant B-1 noted that even though she has a smaller caseload because she is in a specialized area, she is aware of the differences in student caseloads for academic advisors:

One of the more common complaints I have heard by colleagues at training, seminars, or meetings has been the inconsistency of student caseloads. Part of the

problem is that they can select their advisors for appointments for the general

student population. Therefore, being in high demand by students can be

detrimental for some advisors. In contrast, others can have an excess of free time,

which hopefully they take advantage of to benefit the students they advise.

Participant B-2. Participant B-2 exhibited similar experiences to Participant A-5

with having to deal with student caseload management:

Last year, my student caseload increased by nearly 200 students; next year, the

projection looks the same, putting me over 1,000 students. To maximize the face-

to-face time with each student, I have to constantly take my work home and work

for 2 hours on average each night and sometimes on weekends for more

prolonged periods depending on the academic calendar. The administration needs

to make sure there is better management of caseloads; otherwise, we will have

advisors who will experience burnout.

Participant B-3. Participant B-3 discussed the frustration of other academic

advisors who get constant recognition for achieving institutional goals; however, they

carry a much smaller student caseload because of being involved with government grant

funding programs that are only specific for a smaller percentage of the overall student

population:

Honestly, it can be disheartening when you see the college's administration

praising other student services support advising areas for their success because

these areas are government grant-funded and minimize that are specialized, and

do not have to deal with the majority of the college's student population like me.

What makes matters worse when the administration expects you to do your part?

Yet, you cannot access the same resources that those prosperous specialized areas do. Instead, you have to deal with sharing the already limited resources with others in your department who are in the same predicament as you.

Participant B-4. Participant B-4 shared a similar experience with the inequality of recognition to academic advisors at her institution:

Over the last 10 years, I can count the times I have been recognized for my efforts in advising students or my success stories shared amongst the college as I have seen with other departments. Yet, I have seen my average time spent with each student dwindle during this same time, yet the expectation is to "do more with less," which is ironic because we are often told to advise our students the opposite.

Participant B-6. Frustration because of the difference in caseload and lack of recognition was also a concern for Participant B-6:

Recognition is essential for employee morale, but praise can also affect those not being recognized. For example, I have one of the larger student caseloads at this college, yet those who advise as many students in a year as I suggest in a month are the advisors being recognized. If I could spend three to 4 hours face-to-face with each of my students, they would be experts in Guided Pathways and have 2 years of academic planning set by the end of their first year.

Participant B-7. Participant B-7 mentioned that her caseload changes noticeably during different times of the year:

One of the biggest challenges I face as an advisor is how my caseload changes during winter and summer breaks. With some advisors only being required to

work 9 months of the year, classified advisors have to pick up the slack in terms

of student caseload, which ultimately takes away from other students and the

amount of time classified advisors get to spend with them, especially during those

critical summer months when students are making their transition [from high

school to community college].

Theme 3: Internal Conflict

Internal conflict is something that occurs in any organization. California

community college student succession rates within the Guided Pathways program require

the collaboration of many academic advisors and their colleagues on all levels. Based on

the interviews, most academic advisors shared internal conflict experiences between

themselves and other academic advisors, classified employees, faculty, and college

administration.

Participant A-1. Participant A-1 mentioned how others within his college often

try to provide their own opinion to his advising:

Don't get me wrong, I love my job and have a passion for what I do and our

students, but I do not know if I can say the same for others I work with at the

college. Being an advisor for our students is challenging enough, but what makes

it more difficult is when others try to tell you how to do your job. There seems

always to be a critic, whether it is other advisors who question your advice or

from above who want to chime in because they just came back from a seminar

with the latest fad.

Participant A-2. During the interview, Participant A-2 expressed the negativity they experienced firsthand for actions taken as an academic advisor by others within Institution A:

Even though my title or position says I am classified, and I teach both at this college and other colleges part-time faculty, it is evident that my status as a classified staff member makes other advisors who are recognized as faculty about other faculty about my advice given to students. Not every experience with counselor counterparts has been bad, but it can vary from counselor to counselor. On one occasion, I have been reminded of the difference between my title and the other person's title and that my role was to support them and not overstep my boundaries. I have been "talked down to" for taking notes about my interactions with a particular student and others. I was "talked down to" for not including directives because of reluctance based on prior interactions.

Participant A-3. Participant A-3 talked about experiencing similar negative interactions with others at his college:

When I was new to advising, I understood and appreciated others looking out for me and helping me grow because my advising directly impacted the students I worked with. However, now that I am a few years in, there is a difference between providing constructive criticism and being rude. Maybe I do not have my master's yet, but the difference in education level does not automatically make one's opinion superior to another. What makes matters worse is that students have been present during these conflicts. These extreme events take away my time from my students and get them on their path.

Participant A-4. Considering herself a relatively new academic advisor at

Institution A, Participant A-4 discussed her reluctancy to approach her colleagues for

advice based on previous instances:

> During the beginning of my second year of advising, many new things were
>
> coming about, like AB 705 and the introduction of the Guided Pathways program.
>
> After finishing up a pop-in appointment with a student, I had some reservations
>
> about some advice I gave to the student and wanted to "pick the brain" of my
>
> more experienced office neighbor. The conversation started okay, but this person
>
> I trusted became loud and disrespectful to where I walked out. In addition, this
>
> person involved our manager, creating a wave of workplace drama over nothing.
>
> My whole point was to ensure that I assisted the student to the best of my ability,
>
> gained the insight of an experienced peer, and did not develop unnecessary drama.

Participant A-5. Participant A-5 discussed how others at the college are

hypocritical when dealing with treating others:

> Over the last 3 years, I could not tell you how many different training sessions or
>
> meetings addressed how we should treat our students respectfully and approach
>
> them when trying to help them with Guided Pathways and academic planning.
>
> What is ironic about these lessons is that those same individuals giving the
>
> presentation are the worst people to deal with, as their opinion is always correct
>
> and what you did was wrong. But unfortunately, nothing can change their
>
> opinion, even regarding the Guided Pathways-related decisions.

Participant B-2. Participant B-2 was vocal about an incident with another

academic advisor in which his advising was questioned unethically:

Summers tend to be busier for me because of the unavailability of some academic

advisors. Therefore, I often will advise students who may have a regular

academic advisor. There was one incident where I suggested a student who

decided to switch their original chosen pathway leading into their third and final

year at my college. The student was at our college for one academic semester

with the newly chosen pathway. Upon the student's regular academic advisor's

return for the Fall semester, they called me into their office to question my

reasoning and blamed me for being stuck at the college. Had the other academic

advisor talked to the student, they would have learned that the change was for a

work opportunity that would also pay when he transferred.

Participant B-4. Participant B-4 agreed with Participant B-2 that the most

common source of conflict comes from other academic advisors:

Too often, the biggest problems I encounter come from other advisors. I am fully

aware that one of the goals of Guided Pathways is to minimize the time students

spend at community colleges. But I rather have a student willing to commit to

full-time status for 3 years and complete their pathway than push them to attend

intersessions and 15+ units each semester to complete their studies in 2 years

while increasing the probability of dropping out. Some people forget we are there

to listen to the student and work on what is best for them and their success, not

one's professional viewpoint to the point that they will override your logical

advice.

Participant B-5. Participants B-5 shared their personal experiences similar to

those of Participant A-3, in which other individuals within their institution questioned the

direction given to students, even going to the point of meeting with students and

convincing them to choose a different pathway:

> People tend to forget that to achieve the goals of our college and the state in terms
> of increasing student success in outcomes of transfer, certificate, and degree
> completion rates, we need to remember that we, as advisors, need to make a
> collaborative effort. For example, it is hard to advise students, help them pick a
> pathway, and then have another team member talk the student into reconsidering
> other pathways because of a different opinion without even talking to me.

Participant B-6. Participant B-6 recalled a training day when both a faculty

member and administrator questioned her after she shared how she advised a student who

was unsure about which pathway to choose:

> During this training session about Guided Pathways about a year ago, I
> voluntarily shared a story about a new student debating which pathway she should
> choose. Together, we came up with a solution that allowed the student to take a
> few courses from both pathways, leaving the student with two elective courses no
> matter which pathway they chose. Of course, all the classes were transferable too,
> but I felt these individuals chastised me during the training because I did not lock
> down the student on one pathway and was accused of prolonging that student's
> time at our college.

Participant B-7. According to Participant B-7, questioning one's advising is

common, but there should still be some professional courtesy demonstrated:

> One of the most discouraging things that an academic advisor is seeing when
> others include you in emails to our bosses or coworkers about an incident; even if

your name is not mentioned in regards to SEP, they had to "correct" because of an

alleged error. Had it been me, I would have called the person in question aside

and made it a learning experience and not an opportunity to give a scolding,

especially when it is unwarranted. I never intend to steer a student away from a

chosen pathway if the choice is not theirs.

Theme 4: Onboarding

For most community colleges across the nation, the typical experience for

millions of first-time students includes a multiple-step process that involves filling out an

application, taking a placement test, registering for classes while maybe attending an

orientation and seeing an academic advisor (Jenkins et al., 2020). According to Jenkins

et al. (2020), most students who participate in dual enrollment courses during high school

do not necessarily have a distinct advantage when entering the transitioning period into

community colleges.

To accommodate this onboarding issue with the incoming California community

college students' unpreparedness and indecisiveness when transitioning from high school,

efforts have been made to improve the onboarding process. Institutions A and B have

specific departments that make numerous outreach efforts to local high schools and other

community-based education programs throughout the calendar year to prepare students

better and aid academic advisors. Although these outreach efforts have been credited

with helping many new students complete the initial college application process, there

have been some follow-up issues affecting the latter end of the onboarding process.

Participant A-1. Participant A-1 recalled how even though he has seen progress

in recent years, there are still areas in which growth is desired:

Coming from someone who worked closely with the department that helped reach

out to the students while they were still in high school, I can say that our college

has made notable strides in onboarding. However, I must also admit that many

aspects of onboarding still need to improve for us to properly prepare our students

for their first semester at the community college. In my opinion, the recent

pandemic shutdown made us reevaluate our onboarding process and the need for

change if we continue to increase enrollment and student success. Our

onboarding process should not end once the student receives their student

identification number and complete all the preregistration steps but continue

throughout those new students' first academic year.

Participant A-2. Participant A-2 shared the sentiment with Participant A-2,

seeing similar shortcomings with the onboarding process currently in place:

Even though our onboarding process has improved in recent years, we must

continue developing our onboarding methods for our students. We [college] have

certain expectations from them as they come aboard. Still, we often fail to realize

that there might be expectations from them of us but do not consider how a

Participant established onboarding method would help us out.

Participant A-4. Participant A-4 discussed how there is a general misconception

of what an onboarding process is:

We have a big event each year welcoming incoming students and their families to

the college. Many mistake this as our onboarding process because of its large

attendance and positive reviews. As good as the attendance is, it only represents a

nonmajority portion of our incoming students. Not all in attendance go to the

various informative booths and workshops available on that day. There is not

much of an alternative option for those who cannot attend, and in my opinion, the

event is not enough.

Participant A-5. Participant A-5 talked about how she believed a more

substantial onboarding process would improve the efforts to connect students to

pathways:

The problem with not having a solid onboarding process at our college is that we

try to play catch up with our students, and the sad truth is that we lose many in the

meanwhile. If I were to estimate, I would have to say that 95% of the students I

met with had never heard of Guided Pathways before I provided them with a brief

introduction during our first meeting. If we had an onboarding process that

discussed Guided Pathways, academic advisors like me would have more time to

advise our students.

Participant B-3. Participant B-3 was concerned about the misconception of

special events being an effective onboarding process at his community college:

I cannot deny that the welcoming students we hold every year for our new group

of students and their families are a constructive onboarding resource for some of

our new students. However, our strive to improve our onboarding process should

not solely depend on this event. The reality is that the event usually is held the

day before the Fall semester begins, which is too late to get students "on board."

Participant B-4. Participant B-4 brought up the point of how the pandemic has

awoken many for the need for more onboarding resources for incoming students:

Our onboarding process has always required improvements, but with our college

shutting down with this pandemic immediately, we had to scramble to find

alternative resources for our students, including our onboarding process. The

pandemic helped us realize the different ways that students seek out information

and get things done, which we can now use to help enlighten them about how our

college can meet their educational needs and how Guided Pathways can assist.

Participant B-5. Participant B-5 discussed the idea that the failures of community

college's onboarding process often derive from the lack of accountability of others within

the system:

Accountability seems to be one of the biggest roadblocks I see firsthand regarding

our Guided Pathways. For example, our lack of an onboarding process results in

people "pointing their fingers" at others instead of coming together, using our

collective ideas and experiences, and putting our minds to help assist our

struggling students.

Participant B-6. Participant B-6 mentioned the importance of introducing the

Guided Pathways to the largest audience of prospective students 2 years before their high

school graduation would be beneficial to the onboarding process for both the students and

the recruiting community colleges:

We already know that most of our new students each academic year will be

coming from the local high school within our community, so we need to establish

an onboarding process that starts at those schools no later than the junior year of

its students. If California community colleges universally practice this, we might

improve our chances of our local high schools participating in this process. To

top things off, we can tie in introducing the Guided Pathways at the same time and through this onboarding process, so when it comes to registering for that first semester; most will have a clear understanding of what path they want to choose and start with the second pillar and move forward in the right direction.

Participant B-7. Participant B-7 mentioned how specialized programs offered at Institution B had demonstrated robust onboarding processes that the college as a whole could benefit from looking at:

One specific program [name deleted upon request] has had a robust onboarding process for the students, and results have shown favorable for these students. However, many of this group's students come from similar backgrounds and hardships to most of our incoming students. In my opinion, we need to observe what others are doing and at least give try it out in a larger capacity.

Theme 5: Unclarity of Responsibilities

Because of state and federal grant funding regulations, other academic advisors' list of responsibilities can be specific. However, academic advisors' roles within the California community college can be extensive and outdated, which can be an issue when they are asked to perform specific duties that might be considered out of one's job classification, becoming a union issue. Most of the academic advisors interviewed discussed their own experiences dealing with the uncertainty of what is and is not required in their position and how it can affect their decision-making process.

Participant A-1. While talking about his variances in student caseloads, Participant A-1 mentioned how his responsibilities change at times:

Since some academic advisors are classified as faculty, they are not required to work during the 6-week intersessions during the winter and summer months. Some choose to work on a limited basis, which means that often advisors like myself have to deal with questions they might usually handle, which increases my overall caseload. However, the faculty-advisor services I provide to the students should include "out of class" pay, but I never do because my job responsibilities are vague and outdated.

Participant A-2. Participant A-2 reflected on a few occasions in which her actions as an academic advisor got mixed reviews by colleagues at Institution A because of the differences in opinions and expectations:

Sometimes, I do not know what is required of me as an advisor because management and nonmanagement individuals try to tell me what I should or should not be doing. Each instance is different, and there are some situations in which I have been reprimanded for doing something that I previously praised. That part of my essential job duties states other duties, which is too vague. Unfortunately, as I mentioned, instances will continue to happen and not change anytime soon unless the administration or HR step in, put their foot down, and exercise their authority.

Participant A-3. Participant A-3 discussed the fact that even though he is an academic advisor, there are other duties that he performs that take away from his advising duties:

Advising is my primary job responsibility, but I often perform other tasks, typically for the clerical staff or an administrative assistant, because my area is

small. I was raised to help out wherever I can at my job, but students should be the priority in my position and each hour I spend doing clerical work is one less hour I have helping students plan out their education.

Participant A-4. Participant A-4 admitted that she was aware that many nonfaculty academic advisors work out of class throughout the year:

Because I am limited with the amount of time I can work during the two intersessions, I know that many educational advisors work outside their classification and perform advising duties that I would generally be expected to do and are not given restitution for their efforts. Yet, without these efforts, our students would be the ones who would suffer.

Participant A-5. Participant A-5 seemed to concur with Participant A-4 in how educational advisors often are given job responsibilities that are generally for counselors:

Credit should be given to educational advisors. They must step up and take upon other positions like mine at limited capacity during a few periods throughout the year, including the peak period during the summer. In addition to new job responsibilities, these advisors are given more students to add to their already heavy caseloads, limiting their time with each student.

Participant B-2. Participant B-2 also commented on the problems with his job responsibilities changing because of the generic phrase "other duties assigned":

I think any job description, job duties, or responsibilities that still have the phrase "other duties assigned" verbiage attached should throw red flags for necessary revision. For example, my primary duties should reflect my job title as an advisor and not have that disclaimer that allows my superiors to change my

responsibilities with whatever is most convenient for them or others at any given time.

Participant B-4. Participant B-4 shared how over the years her job responsibilities often were dependent on her department's ability to obtain grant funding:

> For 10+ years, I have been an educational advisor, and my job responsibilities depend on whether my department can secure or renew a grant. Even though my job was not grant-funded, many other support staff-type positions in my department depended on funds. Thus, at times like now, I have to assist with other department matters as needed, limiting the maximum amount of time I can spend advising each student I meet with.

Participant B-5. Like Participant A-3, Participant B-5 discussed the fact that he too is regularly given tasks that are nonadvising by his supervisor:

> Towards the end of last year, our department had our administrative assistant go out on leave, and I was given a good portion of her job duties for several months. What bothered me is that other staff could have shared some of these responsibilities, but there would have been some union issues because the grade classification was too different. While because of a line that states something like "other job duties as assigned," my supervisor can add other nonadvising jobs as they feel. Supporting our students with advising should have wherever triumphed any additional costs.

Participant B-7. Participant B-7 expressed how their job responsibilities stayed relatively consistent during the two full-term academic semesters yet seemed to change during the short-term intersessions:

My job responsibilities seem relatively consistent during the fall and spring

semesters; however, I have noticed that my job responsibilities have changed in

recent years during the winter and summer intersessions. Over the last academic

year, I have seen where my job duties would be categorized for more of a

counselor position versus an educational advisor, which is my current job. As a

public servant, my goal is to be here to help the public and our students to the best

of my abilities, so they can start or continue their academic journey successfully;

however, it would be friendly to have some sort of general clue on what is

"expected" of me throughout the year and not have to worry about unexpected

changes.

Theme 6: Administrative/Government Intervention

As a result of heavy reliance on state and government funding, community

colleges are often meant to conform to new policies and legislation, which require change

(Kelly & Carey, 2013). As a result, new policies and guidelines from higher education

institutional management and government agencies can occasionally factor into how

academic advisors guide their students during their educational journey. For example,

recent actions by California community colleges might be reflective of the passing of

state legislation such as AB 705, which required these colleges to change how students

were placed into college-level English and math courses and, along with the creation of

additional student support courses and services, to increase full-time student status and

success rates.

Participant A-1. Participant A-1 revealed mixed feelings when having to

incorporate new government and college administrative policies affected his advising:

Mostly, I like to be optimistic when new policies come into effect because the

intention is usually to benefit the students in the end. However, often I believe

that the new policies or regulations are launched where things fail. For example,

AB 705 can benefit many students from being stuck in remedial classes. Still, the

college will come back and advise students to take certain classes simultaneously,

making it difficult for them to succeed and delaying the student's progress

because of course repetition.

Participant A-2. Participant A-2 discussed how her advising of students changed

significantly with the implementation of AB 705:

Before implementing AB 705, I worked with assisting students with their

assessment results and class placement. Still, with our college becoming

compliant with AB 705, I had to change how I advise students with their course

selection. AB 705 eliminated several remedial courses that would benefit our

incoming student population and were now replaced with nonremedial courses

with nontransferable support class units. With each new legislation and college

policy implemented, change is required on my end.

Participant A-3. In his interview, Participant A-3 discussed how there were

benefits with the recent implementation of AB 705 into his institution; however, he was

advised by his institution's management when assisting students with schedule planning:

Overall, I believe that legislature like AB 705, for the most part, is designed to

help our students and get them through the community college process quicker

because they are not stuck here for two or more years than they should be; we

have been recommended not to advise students to take both their required English

and math courses at the same time, which can result in a delay in the student's

progress if they choose pathway such as a STEM pathway because those require

multiple math classes, some of which that are not always offered during our

winter and summer sessions.

Participant B-1. Participant B-1, who worked directly with STEM students,

shared a similar issue with how administration and government intervention sometimes

contribute to the delay of a student's progress through the Guided Pathways:

In my opinion, the recent passing of AB 705 was truly designed to assist

California community college students in general. However, it does not guarantee

that most students will get out within 2 years, even after they student has

identified a pathway. For example, some students are not necessarily strong in

math but choose a STEM pathway, which requires a math course each semester.

Although, because of AB 705, the student can take the higher math without an

accurate assessment of their skills, the student can struggle because of the limited

math courses that offer extra support concurrent courses to the students. Students

still receive courses for those concurrent support courses but are not transferrable

or degree applicable.

Participant B-2. The opinion of administrative and government-related policies

and regulations provides mixed results according to Participant B-2:

Each year or so, there seems to be some new policy to help our students, but there

will always be some that will benefit more students than others. The only

problem I have seen over the years is that the college vision and the

policymaker's vision do not align, hurting the students. Because of the pressures

of AB 705, I felt that our college rushed to comply and pushed Guided Pathways simultaneously, which made certain situations difficult for both advisors and our students.

Participant B-4. Participant B-4 mentioned how she thought the college's implementation of AB 705 helped students in choosing pathways:

When reflecting on this past academic year, I believe the pros outweighed the cons when we started fully complying with AB 705 regulations. Most first-year English students found the two-unit support classes helpful in passing the main course. However, from my experience, students who took both English and math courses struggled even with the support classes, so I will consider that when advising new students for the upcoming academic year.

Participant B-6. As many other participants expressed, Participant B-6 also had to reevaluate her advising style with the implementation of AB 705 and Guided Pathways:

Most of the students I previously advised before AB 705 would require remedial courses for math and English, which delayed their time at our college by a year or so, but they were required to be successful. With the elimination of remedial courses with AB 705 and students jumping to the standard math and English courses with concurrent support classes, taking those courses alone could give a student a full unit load. I advised not to take both simultaneously during that first year because if the student felt overwhelmed even with those two classes, they would likely drop out, so I encouraged students to avoid this potential.

Summary

After conducting 12 one-on-one interviews with academic advisors, the researcher identified six significant themes associated with student success and the Guided Pathways program in Californian community colleges. These final six themes were (a) students unprepared/indecisiveness, (b) disparities in student caseload, (c) internal conflict, (d) onboarding, (e) unclarity of responsibilities, and (f) administrative/ government intervention. In Chapter 5, these data are applied to the research questions, findings, implications, and future research recommendations.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Chapter 5 begins with an overview of the study's purpose statement, research question, and a recollection of the six major themes established in Chapter 4 based on the data collected during the interviews. The chapter continues with significant findings based on the six major themes concerning the proposed research questions. Following the findings, conclusions are presented, followed by recommendations and applications to the reader. This chapter concludes with a final commentary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perspectives of academic advisors who are servicing the needs of students within the California community colleges participating in the Guided Pathways initiative. In addition, the study sought to provide a detailed understanding of the perceptions of (a) the academic advisor's role in the community college meeting the goals outlined by the California Guided Pathways initiative and (b) the community college's role in affecting the success rate of students enrolled in the Guided Pathways-based programs.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions for this study:

Primary Research Question: From an academic advisor's (i.e., counselor and educational advisor) perspective, what role does the advisor play in California community colleges' ability to meet the goals outlined by the California Guided Pathways initiative?

Secondary Research Question: From an academic advisor's perspective, what are the

critical issues California community colleges need to address to increase student success

in California Guided Pathways-based programs?

Review of the Six Major Themes

As noted in Chapter 4, six significant themes were discovered after analyzing the

data collected from the 12 interviews. Figure 4 illustrates the total number (calculated

frequencies) of relevant words in conjunction with each significant theme. In contrast,

Figure 5 illustrates the percentage of the participants who responded with information

related to each theme.

Figure 4

Comparison of Relevant Word Totals per Theme
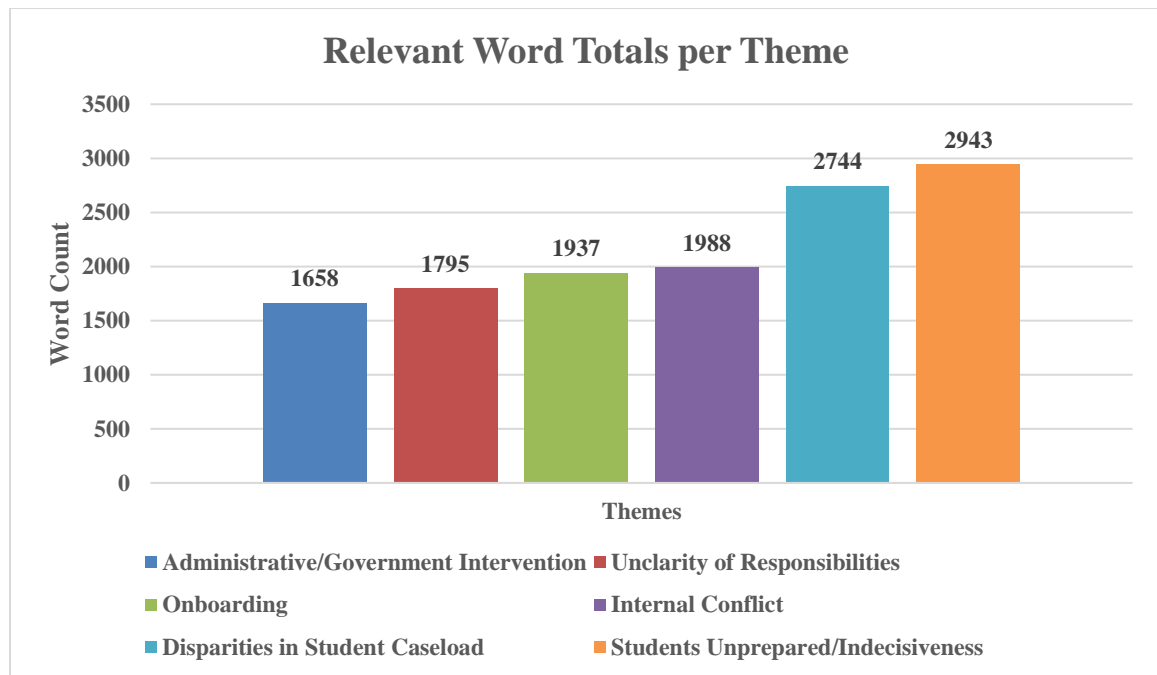
Figure 5

Percentage of Participants Identifying With Themes

Percentage of Participants per Theme

Bar chart with Y-axis labeled "Word Count" ranging from 0% to 100% and X-axis labeled "Themes". Bars show: 75%, 75%, 83%, 83%, 92%, 92%.

Legend:
- Administrative/Government Intervention
- Unclarity of Responsibilities
- Onboarding
- Internal Conflict
- Disparities in Student Caseload
- Students Unprepared/Indecisiveness
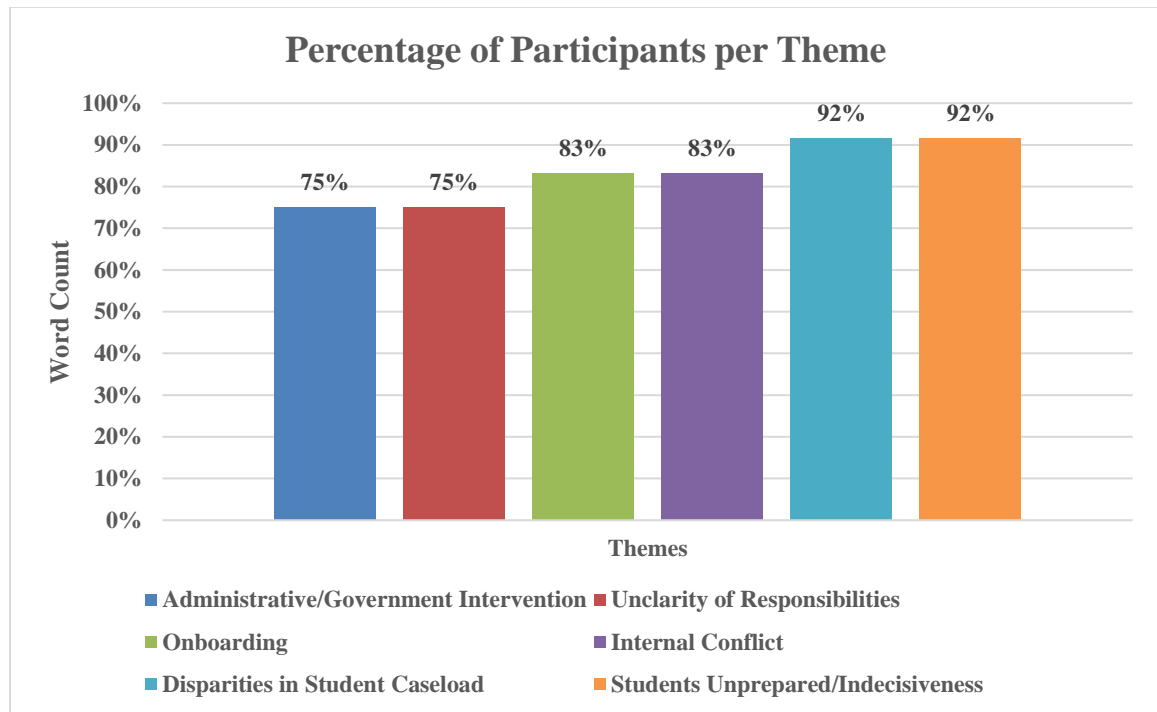
Major Findings

Based on the results of this study, the critical issues that California community colleges need to address to increase the student success rate within the Guided Pathways programs center around three key areas, which are connected. The first of these three critical areas is developing a successful student onboarding program for students transitioning from high school to the California community college. Although each of the respective institutions currently provides multiple onboarding resources to their potential incoming students from their surrounding communities, the overall majority of the participants felt there is a need to reevaluate the current onboarding process and look for opportunities to improve the program and create new onboarding programs and

effectively assist students with making the transition from high school to a direct pathway before the beginning of their first academic semester.

The second and third critical areas the interviewed academic advisors identified needed to be addressed to increase the success rate of the California Guided Pathways programs seemingly work together the difference in student caseloads and the unpreparedness/indecisiveness of such students. Based on the data collected from the participants' interviews, academic advisors who deal primarily with advising the general student population, which typically includes students who have not selected a pathway or do not have the essential preparation and planning before enrolling in their first semester of classes, tend to have higher caseloads.

Conversely, incoming California community college students who know a pathway or at least a particular one that interests them can then be referred to specialized academic advisors with lower caseloads. Without any changes to help combat the significant number of students who are unprepared or indecisive when it comes to choosing a pathway, which can be attributed to the other critical area identified in the effective onboarding process, the consensus of the participants was that caseloads continue to increase for academic advisors who already have the highest student caseloads. Therefore, this direction would decrease the already limited amount of time with each student and their chances of success with the California Guided Pathways program.

Conclusion

Based on the data collected, analyzed, and interpreted, the Guided Pathways programs appear to provide an opportunity for California community college students to

complete their schooling successfully. However, within the ideal 2- to 3-year timeframe, with the assistance of academic advisors, internal and external barriers appear to add additional stressors to academic advisors. Although this study only represented a small percentage of the overall academic advisor population in the California community college system, the results demonstrate how critical the need is for academic advisor support for the ideals of the Guided Pathways Program to meet the levels of success desired by the system's administrators. Finally, although some may posit that each California community college has its own distinct educational and student body culture, the majority if not all of the significant themes that appeared in this study would be worth reviewing when considering that many of the themes discovered have been identified as issues at the community college levels in previous studies.

For example, in their respective studies, Light (2001), Duffy (2002), Seidman (2005), Tinto (2006), Bahr (2008), Karp et al. (2008), McClenney (2009), Jenkins and Cho (2013), O'Banion (2017), and Generals (2018) all referred to the issue of unpreparedness and lack of onboarding of incoming community college students in general when making the transition from high school and the necessity of guidance, which often was left to be dealt with by academic advisors. However, the study also reiterated Shepherd's (2018) findings, which illustrated a concern of academic advisors being overloaded with the size of their caseload of students, whose unpreparedness only added to the pressure to perform. Higher caseloads of students equated to less time that academic advisors had with each of their students, perpetuating the cycle and providing less one-on-one time, potentially required, for high-risk students.

Internal conflict issues should be investigated, and the unclarity of job responsibilities should be reviewed to demonstrate to academic advisors that support is available from an administrative end. In addition, the researcher recommends a continual reevaluation and emergence of administrative policies and procedures from both the state and local levels to better prepare students during the transition from high school to community college. Without continual adaptation, community college students will continue to be at a disadvantage from the beginning of their higher learning process (Duffy, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Moreover, from the college's perspective, a lack of effort to remedy or address the current situation will continue to factor into the overall success or failure of the community college, the students, and stakeholders.

Implications for Action

Implementing the Guided Pathways ideals allows California community colleges to increase traditional full-time students and retention rates. Furthermore, incorporating the Guided Pathways program within a community college's infrastructure decreases the number of excess units California community college students complete at their transfer or graduation, thus minimizing their time at the college closer to the intended 2-year timeframe. However, based on study results, specific areas need to be reviewed and addressed to study results. Finally, specific areas need to be reviewed and addressed to assist academic advisors, and how the Guided Pathways program significantly impacted the current California community college system are discussed.

Prepping Potential Students

Despite the current efforts of California community colleges' student outreach departments to local high schools, as evident within a few of this study's themes, the lack

of an effective onboarding system in a community college can directly affect its students' unpreparedness and indecisiveness. Without an effective onboarding system, the incoming high school students' unpreparedness is going seemingly blind into their first semester while adding extra stress to the ever-growing workload of the colleges' academic advisors. Considering how the Guided Pathways program is set up, its long-term success must integrate a new approach to minimize the number of unprepared students.

Improvement on Onboarding

Jenkins et al. (2020) noted that based on previous studies, an estimated 40% of community college students do not have clear goals when entering their first academic year and unfortunately wait until the end of their first academic year to choose a program of study. Although the community colleges have the resources, including academic advisors available to the new students, the community college students themselves are not going to actively seek guidance, choosing to either self-advise or rely on other means of navigation that are not beneficial for their progress (Jenkins et al., 2020).

According to Jenkins et al. (2020), "Research strongly indicates that choosing a college major that is a good fit for a student results from an active learning process that takes time" (p. 4). Jenkins et al. added, "The typical community college onboarding process is not well designed to guide and support students through such a developmental process of engagement, discovery, and planning" (p. 4). When considering the importance of the time the incoming California community college student and academic advisor select a program adequately, the onboarding process needs to begin sooner rather than later.

California community colleges need to start the onboarding process at a minimum at the same time a typical 4-year college-bound high school student would begin their searching and application process between the high school student's sophomore and junior years. Establishing an onboarding process during this timeframe would allow California community colleges a minimum of 2 years to promote the Guided Pathways and provide an opportunity to introduce the various pathway programs that the college has to offer along with the resources available to the student immediately. In addition, the 2-year timeframe would allow the college to build on the relationship between the academic advisors and the students.

Reevaluate Current Collaborations

Through the collaboration of local and state education administrations, most California community colleges, including the two participating institutions in this study, already offer an array of college coursework to high school students through their concurrent or dual enrollment programs to community public school districts. As a result, students can earn both high school and transferable college credits upon completion of the course. However, taking college courses in high school does not necessarily guarantee that one is adequately prepared to transition to college upon graduation.

Fink et al. (2017) argued that despite the number of high school students taking college credits through dual enrollment course offerings, students are often not provided the support concerning how those courses can lead to a college program of interest. Therefore, without the proper academic advising provided, students can be ahead of their peers from a college credit completed standpoint yet still transition to the community

college after high school unprepared and fall behind in selecting a program pathway like their peers. More importantly, without the proper guidance beforehand, the student can run into the problem of taking college coursework that might not be needed for the selected pathways, thus resulting in the potential of that student graduating with an excess of unneeded credits, which contradicts the ideals of the Guided Pathways initiative.

College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP) Partnership

To better prepare high school students for college and career paths, California Education Code 76004 was created, which granted,

> The governing board of a community college district may enter into a College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP) partnership with the governing board of a school district [to offer or expand] dual enrollment opportunities for pupils who may not already be college bound or who are underrepresented in higher education, [to develop] seamless pathways from high school … to community college for career technical education or preparation for transfer, [improve] high school graduation rates, or [help] high school pupils achieve college and career readiness. (Cal. Education Code § 76000)

On October 4, 2019, through the passing of California Assembly Bill 30 (AB 30) and Senate Bill 586 (SB 586), the CCAP agreement process was updated to make the program more accessible to districts and their students while making continuation schools eligible for participating in the program (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-d). Most recently, on December 11, 2020, California Assembly Bill 102 ([AB 102], 2022) was introduced with the intention to extend the CCAP partnerships authorization from the original January 1, 2027, expiration date to indefinitely.

Even though the purpose of the CCAP is to provide opportunities for students who are not prepared for college or are underrepresented in higher education, some barriers can still prevent them from being involved. First, if parents do not see the value of attending college, they might not sign the necessary agreement application required for their students to participate in the program. Second, students might be deterred from the opportunity, depending on the potential risk of a principal's bias toward the student applying to join the CCAP program.

Finally, the course selection offered between the California community college and the partnering high school might directly impact students taking advantage of this resource. For example, during the spring 2021 semester, through its CCAP partnership with neighboring high schools, Institution A offered both first- and second-year student college-level English courses, along with mathematics courses, which required the equivalent completion or competencies of an intermediate algebra course. When considering that most incoming California college students are not prepared for these courses (which is why the implementation of California Assembly Bill 705 [AB 705] and the creation of concurrent support classes for both freshmen college-level English courses and various mathematics courses occurred), one might question why most courses being offered are ones likely to benefit one who is already college bound and represented.

Instead, when considering the data from this study about the unpreparedness of students, a beneficial alternative route worth suggesting would be for the targeted group of students of the CCAP and the community college outreach departments to design a guidance course as early as their sophomore year of high school. Although this course might not be intended to be a transferrable course to a 4-year institution like the current

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courses being offered at Institution A, the earned units at a minimum could be used as elective credit at both the high school and partnering community college. The structure of this guidance course would include a detailed introduction to all the standard processes that an incoming student is required to complete heading into that all-important first academic semester and the Guided Pathways program and the corresponding pathways to particular careers.

These specialized guidance course instructors would be academic advisors who can incorporate firsthand experiences into their lectures and course design. This process would allow the students to learn the value of engagement with their academic advisor while learning how they will factor into their success at the community college level and beyond. In addition to the course credit being offered, high school students who finish this coursework could receive a certification of completion reported to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office for data collection and tracking purposes. If budgeting permits, these same students could be automatically qualified for 2-year free tuition at the partnering community college if they are not already eligible for the California College Promise Grant based on financial need and at a minimum a book supply voucher for their first academic semester.

Maintaining Balance and Accountability

As identified through the interviews with academic advisors in this study, the disparity of student caseload for advisors at California community college proposes an ongoing problem. Unfortunately, for some California community college students' support service departments, such as the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) and the California Work Opportunities & Responsibilities to Kids (CalWORKs),

the significant inequality of student caseloads cannot be changed because these departments depend on grant funding and other aid from the state (and sometimes the federal government), which specifically can only be used for services such as academic advising only for students who qualify for such programs. However, California community colleges need to reevaluate any departments with non-grant-specific funded academic advisors yet have a significant variance of caseloads and make the necessary changes to how such academic advisors are fully utilized.

For example, during this study's interviews, multiple academic advisors discussed how their respective community colleges' athletics departments had multiple advisors to assist student athletes within their engagement center located away from the general academic advising area. Thus, although the student-athlete population represented a small percentage of Institution A's overall student population and approximately one third of the available academic advisor's average caseload, three dedicated advisors assisted this group. In addition, according to the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2018), higher engagement between students and academic advisors is expected in the nation's community college system.

Unfortunately, California community colleges fail to distribute their available academic advisors more diversely to serve the general student population. In that case, the overall student success rates will likely remain unchanged. Thus, community college administrators must reevaluate how their academic advisors are divided among the different departments and make necessary changes to benefit the more significant student population. In addition, when some academic advisors might become complacent assisting with a particular department, the effort would be in the community college's

interest to encourage the transferring of academic advisors between the different college departments.

Whether the academic advisor is for a specific grant-funded program or the general student population, there needs to be accountability. Academic advisors for underperforming departments must be monitored and reprimanded if necessary. Performance expectations for academic advisors with smaller student caseloads should be higher than their general student population counterparts. When standards are not consistently being met, administrators need to step in and take appropriate disciplinary actions. Future students will be victims of academic advisors' substandard performance and community colleges.

Recommendations for Further Research

All Project Participants

The researcher recognizes that the participating institutions only represented two of the 20 California community colleges participating in the California Guided Pathways Project. Furthermore, both participating institutions were restricted to the SoCal region of the state. Therefore, the researcher acknowledges the benefits of conducting further research that would encompass this research's ideals and include academic advisors from all 20 California community colleges currently participating in the California Guided Pathways Project.

By expanding the interview process to academic advisors from each of the 20 participating institutions, the new study would be to find whether similar themes and findings were prevalent and to provide the chance to discover new themes and conclusions. This information would benefit current and future California Guided

Pathways Project participants. In addition, it would provide data that could be used to strategically plan for further development as the Guided Pathways ideals continue to be implemented throughout the remaining 96 California community colleges.

Timeframe

When taking into consideration that the current 20 participants of the Guided Pathways Project had until 2019 to "design and implement structured academic and career pathways for all incoming students" (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2016, para. 1), revisiting this study after the conclusion of the 2021–2022 academic year would be feasible. This timeframe would provide a minimum of three academic school years of data and firsthand experience by academic advisors regarding the subject matter.

Include Quantitative Data

Along with collecting qualitative data through interviews, including quantitative data to compare progression monitoring purposes in the new study, would be beneficial. Quantitative data could be collected for the same 3-year timeframe, ending after the 2021–2022 academic year. This three-year timeframe could be compared to the academic years before the 2019 deadline for participants to implement a Guided Pathways game plan, which began with the 2016–2017 academic year.

Nonparticipating Colleges

Extending this research topic among the remaining 96 California community colleges not participating in the Guided Pathways Project would be beneficial for further research. Even though the Guided Pathways Project was initially limited to only 20 participants, the Guided Pathways ideology has been continually implemented throughout

all nonparticipating community colleges. Therefore, including nonparticipant colleges would help determine what themes and findings would be found by interviewing academic advisors from nonparticipating schools and determining whether these themes and conclusions related to the subject would be similar or varied.

This follow-up study could also include performance measurements that could be compared between the participating and nonparticipating community colleges to analyze whether the Guided Pathways Project participants had the more favorable student full-time enrollment and units completed. If applicable, those Guided Pathways Project participants who demonstrated promising results could mentor nonparticipating community colleges nearby and collaboratively work with implementing guidelines and procedures to increase their students' retention and success.

Like the participating schools, this study would be reasonable to revisit nonparticipating schools at the end of the 2021–2022 academic year. This timeframe would provide the same minimum of three academic school years of data and firsthand experience by academic advisors concerning the subject matter. Still, this new timeframe could be a valid measurement when comparing data collected against a similar study involving the 20 participants from the Guided Pathways Project.

Effects of the Pandemic

The researcher recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic could have affected how California community college academic advisors dealt with their students and increased the need for guidance for students impacted by the immediate change to only online class instruction, advising, and other student services. Therefore, revisiting the original study involving the original 12 participants and another study open to other academic advisors

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would benefit other academic advisors if another emergency shut down the California community college system because of the COVID-19 pandemic or another emergency. Interview questions could be related to this study's original two research questions but modified explicitly concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and statewide shutdown in March 2019.

Considering that the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown occurred during the tail-end of the 2019–2020 academic year, the follow-up study would focus on the end and include the following 2020–2021 academic year. This follow-up study would provide the opportunity to gather qualitative data, which would include the transition of the California community colleges to the online format, managing a full academic year in which most classes offered were offered online, and the strategies during the transitioning for some colleges back to the primarily physical classroom format during the 2021–2022 academic year.

Relationships Within Each Institution

The researcher believes it would be beneficial for California community colleges to conduct internal assessment mechanisms to determine the health of the relationships between the different classifications (i.e., staff, faculty, administration) throughout each organization. Because the success of implementing the Guided Pathways program within each college and its students depends on all three classifications, institutions would benefit by assessing and reassessing the work environment and the relationships between the three classifications. Any conflict between the three classifications would likely directly impact the institution's students and their positive progression in its Guided Pathways structure.

This recommendation should be revisited annually, and the administration should provide training and opportunities throughout the year to help improve this dynamic. If the institution wants to improve the student–academic advisor dynamic, a conscious effort must be made to improve the employee–employee and employer–employee dynamic.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Although there were some unexpected setbacks related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the postponement of the data collection process for this study because of both participating institutions' immediate closures in March 2020 by local and stated health agencies, the researcher had an overall positive learning experience throughout the research process. From the onset, both college presidents from Institution A and Institution B were incredibly supportive of the researcher's vision, goals, and focus point of this study. In addition, each administrator demonstrated an unmeasurable passion for student success at their community colleges. In the researcher's opinion, this same intensity for student success was evident throughout each of the 12 interviews with academic advisors.

Regardless of the new challenges that arose with the COVID-19 pandemic, most academic advisors were optimistic about these new challenges. Most participants felt that each new challenge brought an opportunity for growth for themselves and their community colleges. For example, the Zoom application's emergence was notably recognized as the most effective way to communicate to students and other integral members of the community, which could continue to be used regularly as a

communication tool that can be used even after normalcy returns throughout the California community college system.

Upon reflecting on the overall structure of this study's interview/data collection process, the researcher recognized that some modifications could have been made to minimize the redundancy of the participants' responses. These modifications could be attained by minimizing subquestions and soliciting additional information or clarification when this direction was deemed necessary. In addition, as previously discussed, in the opinion of the researcher, the final interview question of this study that dealt with the concept of street-level bureaucracy and whether the academic advisors would identify themselves as a street-level bureaucrat under the definition of Michael Light could have been eliminated from the list of interview questions.

The researcher hopes this study can not only contribute to the participating institutions of this study but also help other California community college systems better understand the academic advisor and student dynamic and how it affects the implementation the Guided Pathways ideology. In addition, when considering the insignificant increase in the number of students who complete their coursework within a 2- to 3-year timeframe, the researcher believes the identified six themes that are evident at the two participating institutions could potentially help other institutions as well. Furthermore, the researcher is hopeful the contents of this research could help identify areas in which California community colleges can improve in terms of the relationship between the classified, faculty, and administrative personnel of each institution because a collective effort by all groups would benefit their students' academic journey and the collective goal of improving the completion ratings statewide while targeting the 2-year

timeframe goal. Otherwise, if California community colleges continue to ignore any (if not all) of the six themes identified within the study, the researcher fears even with the proven success of the Guided Pathways ideology throughout the nation, the California community college system will regress toward its predecessor cafeteria approach, resulting in the majority of its students falling within a 4-6-year range for time spent at the 2-year college level.

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APPENDICES

Invitation to Interview Email

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Justin Borden, and I am a student of public administration in the doctoral program at California Baptist University (CBU) and a classified staff member at Riverside City College

I invite you to participate in a research study about the crucial role educational advisors, and academic counselors play in the success rates of community college students within the Guided Pathways program. You have been selected as a potential participant in this study because you are currently employed as an academic counselor or educational advisor at a California community college participating in the Guided Pathways program.

The primary task of this study is that you will participate in a pre-interview questionnaire, followed by scheduling a one-on-one interview in which you will be asked questions about your experience as an educational advisor or academic counselor with California community college students concerning their preparedness for the college experience and the Guided Pathways program. The one-on-one interviews are expected to last between 45 and 60 minutes.

If you agree to participate in the one-on-one interview process for this research study, please print your name, sign it, and date the attached consent form and email it to me at xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx. Once I have received your signed consent form, I will assign an alphanumeric identification for you for tracking purposes. At no time will your name be disclosed during the research gathering process or the dissertation, as your confidentiality will be ensured.

After I have received your signed consent form, I will contact you via email to schedule your interview. A short pre-interview questionnaire will be attached to this email, which could either be emailed back to me once completed or returned to me on the day of the scheduled one-on-one interview.

Virtual interviews can be scheduled as early as June 19, 2020, and will continue to be scheduled until August 14, 2020. Interview times are flexible and can be scheduled after hours and on weekends.

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with me, the community college you work for, your college's president, or California Baptist University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.

There are no expected risks for participating in this research. If you become fatigued, please remember that your participation is voluntary, and you may end your participation

at any time. Although I cannot guarantee that you will receive any benefits from this research, I believe this research will contribute to a growing body of research in the field of public administration in regard to the significance of the academic advisor's role in student success in the Guided Pathways program within the California community college system.

The institution's IRB committee formally approved this research study on February 21, 2020, and by California Baptist University's IRB committee (IRB# 044-1920). In addition, this research study continues to adhere to the guidance of the institution's president. If you have any questions about this research, you may contact me directly at xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx or via my cell phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Justin Borden, MPA, MBA, MA

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Introduction: My name is Justin Borden, and I am a public administration student in the doctoral program at California Baptist University (CBU). I would like to take the opportunity to invite you to participate in a research study about how crucial the academic advisors play in the success rates of community college students within the Guided Pathways program. You were selected as a potential participant in this study because you are currently employed as an academic counselor or educational advisor at a California community college participating in the Guided Pathways program. The primary task of this study is to participate in a pre-interview questionnaire, followed by scheduling a one-on-one interview in which you will be asked questions about your experience as an academic advisor with California community college students concerning their preparedness for the college experience and the Guided Pathways program. The one-on-one interviews are expected to last between 45 to 60 minutes.

What to Expect: If you decide to participate, you will be asked to fill out a five-question pre-interview demographically based multiple-choice questionnaire that can be returned to me via email at xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx or on the day of your scheduled one-on-one interview. During the interview, you will be asked eight open-ended questions, some of which might have sub-questions.

Risks and Benefits: There are no expected risks for participating in this research. If you become fatigued, please remember that your participation is voluntary, and you may end your participation at any time. Although I cannot guarantee that you will receive any benefits from this research, I believe this research will contribute to a growing body of research in the field of public administration in regard to the significance of the academic advisor's role in student success in the Guided Pathways program within the California community college system.

Data Protection and Privacy: If you agree to participate in the one-on-one interview process for this research study, your name will only be used for this consent form. Once I have received your signed consent form, I will assign an alphanumeric identification for you for tracking purposes. This consent form will be stored in a secured, password-protected database that only can be viewed by me, the Principal Investigator of this study.

Participation: Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with me, the community college that you work for, your college's president, or CBU. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.

Questions and Contacts: If you have any questions about this study (before or after participating), please feel free to contact me at xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx or (xxx) xxx-xxxx or my faculty advisor, Dr. Kathryn Norwood (xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx); (xxx) xxx-xxxx. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the

Institutional Research Board (IRB) of California Baptist University. This committee reviews this reach to ensure participant welfare at IRB@calbaptist.edu. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Consent: By providing your printed name, signature, and date here, you are indicating that you have read and understood the information provided above and that you willingly agree to participate in the one-on-one interview process. In addition, by providing your printed name, signature, and date, you acknowledge that you are aware of the option to withdraw your consent at any time, discontinue participation without penalty, and have been offered a copy of this consent form.

Please provide your printed name, signature, and date below if you want to participate in this research study.

_____

Printed Name

_____

Signature

_____

Date

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form (Revised)

Introduction: My name is Justin Borden, and I am a public administration student in the doctoral program at California Baptist University (CBU). I want to take the opportunity to invite you to participate in a research study about how crucial the academic advisors play in the success rates of community college students within the Guided Pathways program. You were selected as a potential participant in this study because you are currently employed as an academic counselor or educational advisor at a California community college participating in the Guided Pathways program. The primary task of this study is to participate in a pre-interview questionnaire, followed by scheduling a one-on-one interview in which you will be asked questions about your experience as an academic advisor with California community college students concerning their preparedness for college experience and the Guided Pathways program. The one-on-one interviews are expected to last between 45 to 60 minutes.

What to Expect: If you decide to participate, you will be asked to fill out a five-question pre-interview demographically based multiple-choice questionnaire that can be returned to me via email at xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx or on the day of your scheduled one-on-one interview. During the interview, you will be asked eight open-ended questions, some of which might have sub-questions.

Risks and Benefits: There are no expected risks for participating in this research. If you become fatigued, please remember that your participation is voluntary, and you may end your participation at any time. Although I cannot guarantee that you will receive any benefits from this research, I believe this research will contribute to a growing body of research in the field of public administration in regard to the significance of the academic advisor's role in student success in the Guided Pathways program within the California community college system.

Data Protection and Privacy: If you agree to participate in the one-on-one interview process for this research study, your name will only be used for this consent form. Once I have received your signed consent form, I will assign an alphanumeric identification for you for tracking purposes. This consent form will be stored in a secured, password-protected database that only can be viewed by me, the Principal Investigator of this study.

Participation: Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with me, the community college that you work for, your college's president, or CBU. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.

Questions and Contacts: If you have any questions about this study (before or after participating), please feel free to contact me at xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx or (xxx) xxx-xxxx or my faculty advisor, Dr. Kathryn Norwood (xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx); (xxx) xxx-xxxx. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the

Institutional Research Board (IRB) of California Baptist University. This committee reviews this reach to ensure participant welfare at IRB@calbaptist.edu. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Consent: By providing your printed name, signature, and date here, you are indicating that you have read and understood the information provided above and that you willingly agree to participate in the one-on-one interview process. In addition, by providing your printed name, signature, and date, you acknowledge that you are aware of the option to withdraw your consent at any time, discontinue participation without penalty, and have been offered a copy of this consent form.

Please provide your printed name, signature, and date below if you want to participate in this research study.

_____

Printed Name

_____

Signature

_____

Date

* A typed signature can be used instead of a physical signature. If you wish to use this option, please note in the responding email that you want to use this option when attaching the Informed Consent Form Word document.

APPENDIX D

Preinterview Questionnaire

Question 1: What type of academic advisor are you?
a. Academic Counselor
b. Educational Advisor
c. Both

Question 2: How long have you been an academic advisor at a California community college?
a. 1-3 Years
b. 4-7 Years
c. 8-10 Years
d. 10+ Years

Question 3: What is your highest level of education?
a. Associate Degree
b. Bachelor's Degree
c. Master's Degree
d. Doctoral Degree

Question 4: On average, what is the typical range of community college students you interact with during an academic year?
a. 0-250
b. 251-500
c. 501-1000
d. 1000+

Question 5: On average, what is the time spent per student you interact with per year? (Can include email, phone, chat, or one-on-one interactions.)
a. 0-15 minutes
b. 16-30 minutes
c. 31-45 minutes
d. 46-60 minutes
e. 60+ minutes

Interview Questions

1. When reflecting on the four pillars of the Guided Pathways program, in your opinion, what is the most integral pillar and why?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. Through your experience as an academic advisor for a Guided Pathways participating community college, do you feel that your institution adequately offers suitable pathways representative of its student population and their learning and career needs?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   a. What are some of the typical methods that you utilize when helping connect incoming community college students transitioning from high school to potential successful pathways?

   _____

   _____

_____

_____

_____

b. Do you have a preference to employment or educational pathways? Why so?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Based on your experience, are most incoming students transitioning from high school to community college adequately prepared for the Guided Pathways initiative's second pillar (i.e., Enter the Path Pillar)? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

a. How do you see your role as an academic advisor helping community college students within this pillar?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. How do you see your role as an academic advisor contributing to the Guided Pathways program's third pillar (i.e., Stay on the Path) and community college students' continuous success through or her chosen pathway?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

a. What are some of the roadblocks you have experienced from students?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

b. What roadblocks have you experienced from other staff, faculty, or administration?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Although the Guided Pathways' fourth pillar (i.e., Ensure Learning) might be considered more classroom/instructional based, what type of accountability do you hold for yourself in regard to community college students and their overall success within the classroom?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. Now that AB 705 has been implemented into the California community college system, in your opinion, has it helped or hindered the ideals of California's Guided Pathways initiative? How so?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

a. How has AB 705 changed your role and thinking as an academic advisor for incoming community college students transiting from high school?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. When reflecting on your experience with the Guided Pathways program so far, if given the opportunity to change (i.e., add, delete, or expand) one of the four pillars in order to improve the program and its overall success rates within the California community college system. Why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. Theorist Michael Lipsky has referred to some public/civil servants as "street-level bureaucrats" as they are those who work directly with the public and are often given some sort of "degree of discretion" when it comes to enforcing the rules, laws, and policies to which they are assigned to uphold. When considering your role as an academic advisor, would you identify yourself as a "street-level bureaucrat" when making decisions for students within the Guided Pathways program? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX F

Request to Conduct Study – College President

Tuesday, November 5, 2019

To: Institutional Review Board, California Baptist University

Re: Consent to recruit from the organization

Dear [College President's Name, Institution's Name]

We hope to obtain your assistance with a research project related to how significant the role the academic advisor plays in the California community college students' success within the Guided Pathways initiative. This study will comprise individual one-on-one interviews scheduled for 45 minutes but allotted an additional 15 minutes if needed. Anyone wishing to participate in this study is given the right to decline or terminate the study. To maximize the results of this research study and ensure the participants' confidentiality, each participant will be assigned a number for data tracking purposes.

By introduction, Justin Borden is the principal investigator for this dissertation research study. He graduated from the Doctoral program for Public Administration from the Division of Online and Professional Studies at California Baptist University. The chair of the dissertation committee is Dr. Kathryn Norwood.

To assist in this study, we would like you to send out an email to the direct supervisors/managers of those employees whom the principal investigator would like to interview for this research study. Essentially, the participants of this research study would meet the following requirements:

- Currently employed at Institution A or Institution B as an educational advisor or academic counselor on a part-time or full-time status.
- Have one year or more experience as an educational advisor or academic counselor at a California community college participating in the Guided Pathways program.

- Be familiar with the four pillars of the Guided Pathways initiative.
- Basic knowledge of California Assembly Bill 705 took effect during the Fall 2019 semester.

We assure you that your employees' responses are invaluable in this research project. Therefore, the principal investigator will schedule a date and time for the one-on-one interview to notify eligible employees who wish to participate in the research study. During the interview, participants will be provided with a copy of all questions that will be asked during interview and a set of instructions about how the one-on-one interview will be structured.

I, _____, agree to allow Justin Borden to recruit participants from my community college, Institution A/B, for the dissertation study entitled "Finding the right guide to successful academic pathways: The significance of academic advisors and the completion rate success of students within the California community college Guided Pathways program." I understand the benefits, risks, and time involved in this study. I understand that individual participation is contingent upon voluntary and informed consent. I am fully aware of the procedure and agree to allow a demographic collection of participants and a one-on-one interview to be conducted in the manner approved by CBU's IRB (as described in the protocol).

Please contact Justin Borden at (xxx) xxx-xxxx if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

Justin Borden

Kathryn Norwood, Ed.D.
Professor - Education
Online and Professional Studies
Office: xxx-xxx-xxxx
xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx
www.cbuonline.edu

California Baptist University, 10370 Hemet St, Suite 200, Riverside, CA 92503

IRB Approval Letter

IRB # 044-1920 EXP Approval

IR

Institutional Review Board
Thursday, January 16, 2020 at 2:44 PM
To: Justin Arthur Borden
Cc: Kathryn Norwood

RE: IRB Review
IRB No.: 044-1920

Project: Finding the right guide to successful academic pathways: The significance of the academic advisors and the completion rate success of students within the California Community College Guided Pathways program.

Date Complete Application Received: 12/16/20
Date Final Revision Received: 1/9/20

Principle Investigator: Mr. Justin Arthur Borden
Co-PI: N/A
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kathryn Norwood

College/Department: OPS

IRB Determination: Expedited Application Approved – Faculty research using anonymous survey questionnaires; no minor participants; no more than minimal risk/risk appropriately mitigated; no deception utilized; acceptable consent procedures and documentation; acceptable data protection procedures. Data collection may begin, in accordance with the final submitted documents and approved protocol.

Future Correspondence: All future correspondence about this project must include all PIs, Co-PIs, and Faculty Advisors (as relevant) and reference the assigned IRB number.

Approval Information: (Expiration: Full Review Only) Approval is granted for one year from date below. If you would like to continue research activities beyond that date, you are responsible for submitting a Research Renewal Request with enough time for that request to be reviewed and approved prior to the expiration of the project. In the case of an unforeseen risk/adverse experience, please report this to the IRB immediately using the appropriate forms. Requests for a change to protocol must be submitted for IRB review and approved prior to implementation. At the completion of the project, you are to submit a Research Closure Form.

Researcher Responsibilities: The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the research is conducted in the manner outlined in the IRB application and that all reporting requirements are met. Please refer to this approval and to the IRB handbook for more information.

Date: 1/16/20

APPENDIX H

Interview Instructions

Introduction: My name is Justin Borden, and I am a public administration student in the doctoral program at California Baptist University (CBU). I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your willingness to participate in a research study about how crucial the academic advisors play in the success rates of community college students within the Guided Pathways program. You were selected as a potential participant in this study because you are currently employed at a California community college participating in the Guided Pathways program as an academic counselor or educational advisor and met the one-year experience requirement. The primary task of this study is to participate in a pre-interview questionnaire, followed by scheduling a one-on-one interview in which you will be asked questions about your experience as an academic advisor with California community college students concerning their preparedness for college experience and the Guided Pathways program. This one-on-one interview is expected to last between 45 to 60 minutes.

What to Expect: This one-on-one interview will be audio recorded for transcribing purposes. Before the interview process begins, I will ask for your verbal consent that you have already signed a consent form and are ready for the interview. During this one-on-one interview, you will be asked eight open-ended questions, some of which might have sub-question by me (i.e., Principal Investigator). If at any time you would like to skip a question and answer after the last question has been asked, you are entitled to do so or choose to skip the question altogether.

Risks and Benefits: There are no expected risks for participating in this research. If you become fatigued and the water provided is insufficient, please remember that your participation is voluntary, and you may end your participation at any time. Although I cannot guarantee that you will receive any benefits from this research, I believe this research will contribute to a growing body of research in the field of public administration in regard to the significance of the academic advisor's role in student success in the Guided Pathways program within the California community college system.

Data Protection and Privacy: As noted in your consent form, your name will not be revealed at any time. An alphanumeric identification has been assigned to you for tracking purposes.

Participation: Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with me, the community college that you work for, your college's president, or CBU. However, you have the right to have the information you provided during this interview not used during or after the interview.

Questions and Contacts: If you have any questions about this study after participating in the one-on-one interview, please contact me at xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx or (xxx) xxx-xxxx. If

you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, please contact the Institutional Research Board (IRB) of California Baptist University. This committee reviews this reach to ensure participant welfare at IRB@calbaptist.edu. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

APPENDIX I

Interview Questions: Participant Narratives

Question One

The researcher began each participant's interview, "When reflecting on the four pillars of the Guided Pathways program, in your opinion, what is the most integral and why?"

Participant A-1 Narrative. Participant A-1 responded by discussing how he felt that the first (i.e., Clarify the Path) was the most integral pillar. He addressed the need to introduce the Guided Pathways ideology because the concept is foreign to most incoming students, let alone a chosen area of study. Participant A-1 talked about how explaining this time removes the already limited time with the student during their first face-to-face advising meeting. One suggestion given to help with this problem was the establishment of an onboarding process as he expressed, "To help better prepare our students, there needs to be an onboarding process that could introduce the students to the basics of Guided Pathways … the time they meet with me they are between one or two pathways at best."

Participant A-2 Narrative. For Participant A-2, the first pillar of the Guided Pathways program is the most crucial because most students are indecisive about what they want to do. She shared, "Each year, our Outreach departments provide multiple information sessions and outline all the elements of success at the community college are presented to them at the high school level." However, participant A-2 continued, "Most of the students attend just toss aside their resources because there is no effort made between them and their guidance counselors in high school." Therefore, Participant A-2

finds herself having to "start over" with most students by explaining the basics of the community college system and focusing on the ideologies of the first pillar.

Participant A-3 Narrative. Although Participant A-3 personally believes that they should be in the realm of the second pillar during their first meeting, the reality is that most of their time is spent in the first pillar, which is why he feels this pillar is the most important. He shared, "Our college offers several events, seminars, and workshops for incoming students and their parents to help prepare them before that first semester of school ... whereas the truth is that they are not prepared and have no idea where to start." Participant A-3 recognizes that the second pillar of the Guided Pathways model is where commitment is required. Hence, because he is an academic advisor, this was his responsibility to ensure the students were fully aware of their options in the first pillar because of moving on.

Participant A-4 Narrative. Participant A-4 is another advocate for identifying the first pillar as the most critical pillar of the Guided Pathways program. She argued that students should be ready to "choose a pathway" going into their first meeting, but often those meetings turn out to become information sessions. She shared, "I often repeat the same information I go over during the previous academic year for high school students and their parents." She continued, "What becomes frustrating is that I will have students admit they remembered me from one of these information sessions but cannot remember the information shared or what they did with the documents given to them." Participant A-4 felt that if the K-12 public school system followed up at least once on their end, students would be more prepared for the second pillar.

Participant A-5 Narrative. Due to the average new student's unpreparedness for transitioning from high school to community college, Participant A-5 believes that the first pillar of the Guided Pathways is the most critical. She explained, "Of my large caseload, 10% of new students might have taken the time to research different pathways and narrowed the choices down to one or two by the time we meet." Participant A-5 continued, "For most of the students, I have to not only explain the basics of the Guided Pathways program … in hopes we can come to a decision and get them where they need to be going into their first year."

Participant B-1 Narrative. Participant B-1's second pillar (i.e., Enter the Path) is the most integral. She shared, "The second pillar is when the reality sinks into the student's mind that they have committed to academics, which for many might be the biggest academic commitment that he or she has ever made." Participant B-1 added, "When a student reaches this point, I use this opportunity to remind them that I can be their 'go-to' resource and support when they feel it is needed because it is important for them to hear that they are not alone on their journey."

Participant B-2 Narrative. Participant B-2 believes that the first pillar is the more critical one because it "gets the ball rolling" for incoming students sitting "idle" during their transition period. He shared, "By the time we meet, students have been provided all the resources they need about the different pathways that our college offers months in advance; most have not checked their email since it was activated." Participant B-2 is then required to "start over" by introducing the Guided Pathways as if is presented to the student for the first time, thus remaining at the starting point or rather the first pillar.

Participant B-3 Narrative. The first pillar is the clear choice of Participant B-3, although he can argue that the second pillar is just as important. He shared, "The second pillar is important because this particular pillar in which the student commits to a pathway … the student's inability to make a decision on pathway makes the first pillar crucial." Participant B-3 explained, "Students will just pick the first pathway you introduce to them or rely on you to pick one for them … responsibility to take the time and explain the different options and assist the student in selecting the right pathway for them."

Participant B-4 Narrative. Participant B-4 argued that the second pillar was the most important of the four Guided Pathways pillars because, during the second pillar, the student begins their journey and the community college and is given the academic freedom they have never been given. She shared, "In high school, students are told what to take except for maybe some electives … have the opportunity to choose what they want to learn and what time best works for them." Participant B-4 added, "During this pillar, I can provide that first boost in confidence in the student, which can potentially be the first one they experience in their young adult life."

Participant B-5 Narrative. The first pillar of the Guided Pathways model was the immediate first choice for Participant B-5. According to Participant B-5, "Students do not know their options or know the options and have no clue what they want." He further explained, "I put some of that 'unknowing' part of their high schools and some of the blame on the student themselves … at one point, they need to expect people to hold their hands through the whole process." Participant B-5 feels that the first pillar is where an advisor can show students that their pathway is their decision alone.

Participant B-6 Narrative. Participant B-6 could not decide between the first and second pillars of the Guided Pathways program being the more integral. She argued that the first pillar is when the student observes the "mapped out" version of their academic goals, while the second pillar is where the first step is taken to reach that goal. She shared, "What I like about the first pillar is that it visually provides a student with a blueprint … the second pillar is the point in which student decides for their success and ask 'you' for assistance in making it happen."

Participant B-7 Narrative. Participant B-7 argues that the third pillar is the most critical because students have to follow through with their select pathway within this pillar. She shared, "The third pillar is when the student has to start attending classes, studying for exams, doing, sacrificing time … is the first time the student reflects on their decision and whether it was the right one." Participant B-7 noted that within this pillar, an academic advisor could gauge the relationship with the student. She added, "Not hearing from a student during the semester can be a good or bad thing depending on the student … sometimes requires me to start the communication process and remind the student I am there to support them."

Question Two

As the interview continued, the researcher asked each participant, "Do you feel that your institution adequately offers suitable pathways representative of its student population and their learning and career needs?"

Participant A-1 Narrative. Participant A-1 agreed that his community college offered adequate pathways representing its student demographic. He shared, "We most definitely have pathways that meet the needs of our students." Participant A-1 added,

"The great thing is that we are still in the learning process and open to creating new pathways as the desire and need for them emerges."

Participant A-2 Narrative. Participant A-2 felt that her institution offers an adequate number of pathways to its student demographic. She shared, "Our institution has over 100 pathways which will lead students to either a certificate, an associate's degree, the opportunity to transfer to the UC/CSU system, or all of the above."

Participant A-3 Narrative. After a quick reflection, Participant A-3 stated that his community college adequately provided its students with a choice of pathways. However, he added, "Not all of our students are looking to move beyond the community college system. We have many pathways options for those students and even more options for our more traditional students."

Participant A-4 Narrative. Participant A-4 felt that based on the Guided Pathways program's short time at her community college, she had not experienced any student complaints of not having a pathway option the student was seeking. She shared, "Although many of our community college students can be indecisive about choosing a pathway right away, most students are happy with various options."

Participant A-5 Narrative. According to Participant A-5, at the end of the academic year, the available pathways at her institution were sufficient. She shared, "Our institution sufficiently offers a diverse number of pathways for our student body, including options that overlap, which provides opportunities for those students who want to double major."

Participant B-1 Narrative. Even though Participant B-1 only worked with students within a specialized pathway group, she felt that her department and other

departments at her community college were adequately represented. She shared, "My area already offers students several different pathways options, and currently planning on expanding those options within the next three academic years."

Participant B-2 Narrative. Participant B-2 thought his community college offered an appropriate number of pathway options to its student demographic. However, he added, "Our community college is specifically known for some of its specialized areas, so many students come to our college versus our sister college because of these programs … still provides plenty of options for the other non-specialized pathways of interests."

Participant B-3 Narrative. Participant B-3 remarked that his community college's pathway options for students were "most" definitely suitable. He shared, "Our college spent a great amount of time developing the current list of pathways we are offering when we found out we would be incorporating the Guided Pathways program. He continued, "The planning committee wanted to ensure that our future students who leaned toward the vocation courses would not be limited with a few options."

Participant B-4 Narrative. Participant B-4 believed that her community college had good choices and cautioned that there were too many pathway options for its students. She shared, "Implementing the Guided Pathways program was supposed to move our college away from the 'cafeteria' approach, but in my humble opinion, we have a "cafeteria" of pathways which can have the same effect on our students." Participant B-4 reiterated why it is vital for students to meet with academic advisors before committing to a pathway.

Participant B-5 Narrative. Participant B-5 feels that his community college provided adequate pathways for its students. He shared, "There is plenty for students to choose from, which is a good thing; however, having too many choices can be bad." Participant B-5 further explained, "Sometimes the student and myself will narrow down the options, but even after one semester, their indecisiveness continues to delay their time at our college."

Participant B-6 Narrative. From her observation, Participant B-6 was convinced that her community college met the needs of its student regarding Guided Pathways options. She added, "Look at the list of pathways at the moment; if a student wants to learn how to develop games, we got a pathway. … If a student wants to be a teacher, we got a pathway. So the options are practically endless."

Participant B-7 Narrative. Participant B-7 agreed that her community college provided its student demographic with reasonable pathway options. However, she added, "I know those same pathways are under review because of low interest and student enrollment, but I also know that there are other pathways under development, so there will always be appropriate options for the students.

Question Two – Follow-Up #1

Understanding that each academic advisor might be impartial in their methods of advising students in terms of Guided Pathways, the researcher proposed a follow-up question to the second interview question by asking each participant, "What are some of the typical methods that you utilize when helping connect incoming community college students transitioning from high school to potential successful pathways?"

Participant A-1 Narrative. One method Participant A-1 found helpful was to take a few minutes during his initial meeting with students to gather some insight about the student that could help provide some pathway options that may "grab the student's eye. For example, he shared, "After my formal introductions, I like to analyze the shared interests of the students and determine if that interest can relate to a particular pathway." Participant A-1 added, "If the student's interests do not correlate with their academic interests, I tend to focus on their career goals, and then we move forward from there."

Participant A-2 Narrative. For Participant A-2, understanding the student's career goals has helped connect students to a particular pathway. She shared, "When students can tell me what areas he or she wants to explore, use that vital information and provide them with a few different pathway options that align with the student's career aspirations." Each of these pathway options is then reviewed with the student hoping that by the end of the meeting, the student, with the advice of Participant A-2, can "roughly" commit to a pathway.

Participant A-3 Narrative. Participant A-3 likes to take advantage of having a smaller student caseload to schedule multiple meetings with the student before the student chooses a pathway. He explained, "Typically, the first meeting with the student is an introductory meeting and lasts about 15 minutes, which is plenty of time for the student to share background and interests that can be translated to potential pathways." Participant A-3 then takes the information gathered and presents his students with a list of pathways via email, reviewed during their second meeting. He added, "During the second meeting, I give the students an option to ask questions, then we go over each of the pathways, and then hopefully come to a decision by the end of the second meeting."

Participant A-4 Narrative. Participant A-4 commented that because of her limited time with each student, she often has to rely on trying to get them prepped about pathways before they meet. She shared, "If I do not reach out to them beforehand, the first meeting I have with the student will be mostly spent explaining the Guided Pathways program ... at a minimum, they at least know the basics of how it [Guided Pathways] works." Unfortunately, Participant A-4 shared that most students do not look at the email until the meeting, delaying the selection process; however, she is still hopeful. She added, "For the student, it is a learning experience, and they learn the importance of checking their emails regularly … eventually get to the pathway through back-and-forth email communication, as we work together to narrow the pathway options with each email."

Participant A-5 Narrative. Participant A-5 has used a standard practice to help students connect with a pathway by filling out a "pre-advising" interview questionnaire. She shared, "When the counseling clerks make appointments for me, they send out a ten-question attachment that gives me some demographical information about the student, which helps me prepare some pathways options for them when we meet." However, during the meeting, Participant A-5 asked the student straight forward if they had a pathway they were interested in before presenting the list of options she generated. She explained, "The decision is the student's and not mind, so if they show interest in a certain pathway, their interest is our starting point."

Participant B-1 Narrative. Being in a specialized department, Participant B-1 takes advantage of preparing materials for each of the different pathways within her area and presents the links to this information for students to review before their first encounter. She shared, "After hearing the student's opinion with the reviewed pathways,

we collaborate and make the first choice and backup choice pathway options to move forward with." Participant B-1 argued, "Choices do not necessarily have to be 'set in stone,' therefore for the student's benefit, I like them to set up a backup choice so if a preference is changed, the transitional plan has been already made."

Participant B-2 Narrative. When meeting new incoming students for the first time, Participant B-2 asks whether the student has had a chance to review some of the community college's pathways that interest the student. He shared, "Even the large majority of the new student population has no clue about what pathway they want, there is still a minority of students who took the time to make at least an effort to explore the options." Participant B-2's strategies change and adapt to the student's needs depending on the student's response. He added, "If a pathway is not chosen by the end of the first meeting, we are at least in the 'ballpark,' and my job is by the next time we meet, a pathway is confidently chosen."

Participant B-3 Narrative. Participant B-3 discussed how he has tried emailing students before their first meeting but often finds that he has to explain the whole Guided Pathways program and the available options for the student during their first meeting. He shared, "It's frustrating because about 90% of the students do not even open their email, which our college uses to communicate to our students … So I prepare as if it is 'Day 1', and we make as much progress as possible." Participant B-3 added, "My goal is to have a student select a pathway by the first meeting, but it often does not happen … come up with a temporary solution because I do not want to rush the student and set them up to fail."

Participant B-4 Narrative. One technique that Participant B-4 has utilized to help students connect with their selected pathway is to complete a brief questionnaire before their initial meeting. She shared, "After I receive the confirmation of our scheduled meeting, I send each student a small questionnaire with five questions to be completed before our meeting." Participant B-4 added, "Based on their responses, I present anywhere from three to five pathway options that might grab the student's interest, and we move on from there trying to narrow the list down to one pathway."

Participant B-5 Narrative. When time permits, Participant B-5 schedules multiple meetings with the students he advises to help direct them to a pathway. Participant B-5 shared, "The first meeting is the more informal of the two meetings, but during that meeting, I can attain information about the student, and together we try to come up with several different prospect pathways." He continued, "At the end of the first meeting, the student leaves with pathway options to review … goal for the student to reduce those options to no more than three, then eventually to one after the second meeting."

Participant B-6 Narrative. The day before meeting with students, Participant B-6 likes to send out a reminder email with a quick overview of what the student should expect and links to the Guided Pathways program and its offerings for students to review. She explained, "Students generally do not read their mail until the last minute, so I like to send the rundown of our meeting the night before because the information remains 'fresh' on their minds, which can help expedite the selection process." Still, Participant B-6 takes precautions because of her awareness of students not checking their emails. She added, "For the many students who did not bother to attempt the pre-meeting work, hope

is not lost … setting a schedule for the first semester to select a pathway before their second academic semester."

Participant B-7 Narrative. Participant B-7 admits that she is still working on "perfecting" how she assists students in choosing a pathway. She shared, "This last academic year, it has been challenging for students to choose a pathway by the conclusion of our first meeting … once again, their preparedness and indecisiveness come into play during the whole Guided Pathways selection process" However, Participant B-7 has experienced more success in giving the student about a month to decide, which often comes through a series of "Q&A" email correspondence.

Question Two – Follow-Up #2

The researcher then asked each participant a second follow-up question concerning the second question to identify if there was a specific type of pathway for the student, proposing, "Do you have a preference for employment or educational pathways? Why so?"

Participant A-1 Narrative. Participant A-1 shared that although he might have a personal preference for a particular pathway, the choice is ultimately up to the student. He expressed, "My job is to advise and assist them with selecting a pathway so we can develop a strategy in terms of scheduling, but not to choose the pathway for them."

Participant A-2 Narrative. Due to the area in which she advises, Participant A-2 prefers direct employment pathways but does not let her preference reflect when assisting the student's decision when entering a path. She stated, "Even though I may have a preference based on my background when selecting a pathway, the student is the one who

is responsible for their selection, and I am there merely to assist them in outlining their journey down that pathway."

Participant A-3 Narrative. Participant A-3 was unable to determine if he had a preference for a particular pathway. However, he shared, "Majority of the students I have dealt with the last year have favorably chosen the more educational route, as they want to move past the community college and transfer to a four-year college to earn a degree."

Participant A-4 Narrative. Based on her personal educational experience, Participant A-5 shared that she tended to favor educational pathways. Still, she discussed how she remains unbiased towards a student's decision, even more employment based. Participant A-5 explained, "For some students, they want to choose a pathway based on a need to make money right away, but I still encourage them to take other courses that can still be transferrable to other colleges should they choose to change; their pathway down the road."

Participant A-5 Narrative. Participant A-5 prefers the educational pathways because the potential earnings for having a college degree are often more favorable. However, she still gives her students the request for their preferences. She shared, "Having students choose their preference is an opportunity for students to build self-confidence in themselves, and as a counselor establishing trust between you and the student."

Participant B-1 Narrative. Participant B-1 works with STEM students; she prefers educational pathways but is open-minded about her advice. She added; however, STEM-related students often already have an idea of which pathway they are interested in pursuing.

Participant B-2 Narrative. Participant B-2 could not select a preference between employment or educational pathways. He noted, "I honestly do not believe I have a preference, but even if I did, that preference should not matter when the time comes for a student to choose their commitment to a pathway."

Participant B-3 Narrative. Having an advanced degree himself, Participant B-3 did admit to having a preference for educational pathways but is open to the selections of his students. However, he added, "Each student has a different background. In some instances, going the employment path is the best option because there is an immediate need for employment due to the need to contribute financially to one's struggling family."

Participant B-4 Narrative. Participant B-4 did not favor one type of pathway or another. Rather like many of his colleagues, he believed that when assisting students in choosing their pathway, the decision should be theirs and theirs alone. He stated, "It is important for the student to select down his or her pathway because when classes start, they will be the ones who will sacrifice their lives inside and outside the classroom."

Participant B-5 Narrative. Participant B-5 could not decide whether he preferred the employment or educational pathway but thought he would lean more towards the academic pathway if he were a community college student today. He reflected, "When I was in community college, there was nothing close to the Guided Pathways, and I never was allowed to meet with a counselor before I transferred out." However, he continued, "About 90% of the incoming students I advise eventually chose an educational pathway."

Participant B-6 Narrative. Participant B-6 responded immediately with "educational." Her rationale was that since many new incoming students are first-generational college students, she tries to encourage them to go as far as they can with their education to set an example for others like them. Still, she does not deter them from choosing an employment pathway. Instead, she shared, "I want what is best for them, so the best person to decide is the student."

Participant B-7 Narrative. Participant B-7 did not prefer when choosing between the employment and educational pathways. She expressed, "The whole Guided Pathways program is still new to me, so I do not currently have a preference at the moment." However, participant B-7 shared that most of the students she helped select a pathway in the last year chose an educational pathway.

Question Three

To gain insight from each participant's firsthand experience in dealing with the typical incoming community college student's transition amongst the first two pillars of the Guided Pathways program, the researcher asked, "Are the majority of the incoming students transitioning from high school to community college adequately prepared for the second pillar of the Guided Pathways initiative? Why or why not?"

Participant A-1 Narrative. Participant A-1 mentioned how many students are unprepared when transitioning from high school to community college. He stated, "We do not have the luxury of having most incoming students as prepared as other students of the same demographic who attend UC or CSU colleges right out of high school." He further elaborated how the average new community college student is unaware of what they want to do and would "float" in the system without guidance. Participant A-1

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continued, "Most of our incoming high school students that attend our community college are here because they do not know what their long-term plans are … some interest in the classes after taking some classes, which helps contribute to the current problem we have."

Participant A-2 Narrative. Participant A-2 discussed one of the most significant issues she has faced with incoming students who expect others to do all the work, including academic advisors. She shared, "There is a certain misconception by the student that we as academic advisors will make their career path and decision for them which is not accurate." Participant A-2 mentioned two common phrases she received during the first meeting with students: "I do not know" and "Can't you just tell me." However, she understands that such responses are not out of defiance for many new students but because others handled matters when they attended high school.

Participant A-3 Narrative. Like his colleagues, Participant A-3 pointed out how transitioning students to being unprepared is a noticeable issue. He noted, "Not being prepared for the transition from high school to community college has a huge backstepping effect on our incoming students." Participant A-3 felt he could provide the necessary time to direct the students he advises because of his low student caseload. However, he would be worried about not having that luxury if his student caseload increased by more than 50 students.

Participant A-4 Narrative. Participant A-4 also identified new transitioning students' indecisiveness as a roadblock to their positive start. She stated, "One of the biggest setbacks of our incoming students is how indecisive they were going into our first meeting, failing to realize that the longer they remain, the longer they remain out of our

college." She mentioned how these delays risk students taking a break from college and never returning or poor academic performance because a student is just registering for any class and losing interest in those classes during the semester.

Participant A-5 Narrative. Participant A-5 feels that the student's lack of knowledge of the Guided Pathways program has continued. She expressed, "If our students could choose a pathway before their first semester, our retention and completion success rating would reflect accordingly." Participant A-5 credits for her institution posting detailed information about Guided Pathways easily accessible on their institution's website. However, it acknowledges that the typical incoming student transitioning from high school will not make an effort to explore on their own.

Participant B-1 Narrative. Based on her assessment, Participant B-1 felt that most incoming students entering her specialized program have a solid idea when transitioning from high school to community college. She shared, "Students are required to attend one of many information sessions during their senior year, so by the time we meet for our first face-to-face meeting, they have an idea of what pathway they want to choose."

Participant B-2 Narrative. Participant B-2 mentioned his "high" hopes each year with new students being prepared to enter his institution but often disappointed. He explained, "I like to be optimistic that with each year, the crop of new incoming students will be more prepared and have a basic understand of what is expected with them entering that first year of college." He further explained that when the disappointment occurs, "… their high schools fail to prepare them appropriately for community college and feel as if the high school just wants to wash their hands of any responsibility."

Participant B-3 Narrative. Participant B-3 questioned how many incoming students were unprepared to decide pathways, let alone understand what Guided Pathways was, considering the amount of information they provided at their high schools. He stated, "When speaking with first-year students and discussing potential paths, I am perplexed how many never recall seeing any of the resources we provided their high schools." Adding to his frustration, students will change their recollections and admit to seeing something disregarding the resource without realizing its importance to their meeting.

Participant B-4 Narrative. Participant B-4 shared a similar insight to her colleague, perplexed that so many incoming students are unprepared for the transition even with all available resources. She stated, "No matter how much information we provide on our website or with the pamphlets and brochures … most of the students I deal with are not where we want them to be going into their first semester." Therefore, participants B-4 felt that some responsibilities needed to be directed at the students.

Participant B-5 Narrative. Participant B-5 discussed how the incoming student's unpreparedness during their transition period only hurts them. He noted, "Majority of our students come directly from high school because they have a sense of uncertainty with what to do with their lives … these uncertainties can turn into roadblocks in life and college." However, Participant B-5 did not put the blame all on the students themselves, as he questioned the lack of a solid onboarding process, "How can we expect anything more from our students when we fail to provide them with legit onboarding process … under the current process, we rush them through the student registration process and wash our hands."

Participant B-6 Narrative. Like many of her colleagues, she admits that being unprepared is an issue and feels that many students face a language barrier. She explained, "Majority of the students that I advise on an annual basis come from homes where English is not the primary language … parent's inability to properly assist them with any college decision-making or guide them to the college's resources." Unfortunately, this language barrier leads to advice from individuals who do not have the necessary skillsets to guide the student in the proper academic success.

Participant B-7 Narrative. Participant B-7 was baffled about how many students graduate and act "clueless "when they meet with her and are expected to choose a pathway amongst the Guided Pathways program. But she thinks that her institution can help initiate the necessary change to improve students' awareness of the transition from high school to community college. She explained, "The level of unpreparedness of our recent high school graduates is the most ordinary roadblock that I am used to seeing … until we have a better onboarding system, it is my job to help them a breakthrough."

Question Three – Follow-Up

Within the ideologies of the Guided Pathways program, the second pillar is where community college students are required to be adequately prepared to transition to the classroom and enter their academic journey in regard to that path. The researcher wanted to understand the significance of an academic advisor's role during this stage, so the researcher asked each participant a follow-up question: "How do you see your role as an academic advisor factor in helping community college students within this pillar."

Participant A-1 Narrative. When considering that most incoming community college students are not ready for the second pillar, Participant A-1 talked about how he

likes to give students a one-semester time limit to reflect on the options. "Students can take a full load of classes during that first semester that counts as general education credit and can be applied to almost every pathway available." Between the student's first and second semesters, he noted how he follows up and tries to lock down on pillars before planning more than one additional semester.

Participant A-2 Narrative. To help students prepare for their transition to the classroom, Participant A-2 has created a preparation checklist. She shared, "There is a small checklist that I give to my students in which checks if they paid their student account fees, got their student id card, purchased books and supplies, and mapped out where their classes are located on or off-campus." In addition, Participant A-2 mentioned each item on the generated checklist.

Participant A-3 Narrative. Considering his smaller student caseload, Participant A-3 would like to reserve a conference room for multiple days the week before classes start to conduct Q & sessions for his students to attend. He shared, "Since my other obligations in my position prevented me from meeting with each student individually … sessions would provide an opportunity to get last-second questions answered and remind students of other resources available to them on campus." Participant A-3 expressed how these sessions' purpose was designed for students to connect with other students who could potentially be another form of support during the academic year.

Participant A-4 Narrative. Participant A-4 offers to send an "encouraging" email to students with a bit of "incentive" to respond to the email. She shared, "Each semester, I construct an email with a quiz, in which five students receive $5 gift cards to the cafeteria … are given to the first three who respond with the right answers, and all

other respondents are put in a raffle." Then, before classes begin, the winners are announced along with the correct answers to each question, which are generated to remind students of support services and contact information while establishing an open communication chain between her and her students.

Participant A-5 Narrative. Considering that her typical caseload of over 1,000 students prevented her from meeting with each student, Participant A-5 chose to use technology to send messages to students. She shared, "Each semester, I like to create a video which starts with a message of encouragement, then reminds them basic tips for being successful in the classroom, and finally ends with reviewing resources at their disposal." Participant A-5 continues to do videos because of the feedback she has received from previous students and because the video can be played back by the student if needed.

Participant B-1 Narrative. Not all incoming students start during the fall semester; Participant B-1 reaches out to students on multiple occasions during the new semester to address any "last second" questions new students might have regarding their pathways, courses, or obtaining resources. She shared, "The first day of class is a big commitment for many of our students, so I try to reach out and see how I can calm their nerves." Participant B-1 added, "The emails are sent out on two waves, the first one to find out common questions by the students, while the second email is a compilation of those questions with the appropriate answers."

Participant B-2 Narrative. Approximately two weeks before the fall and spring semesters, Participant B-2 sends a "mass" email to all the students he advises, including a motivation message and a reminder that he is there to help when needed. He shared,

"Many of our students do not have any support system, so I like to remind them that 'I am proud of them for what they are about to do academically and that I am just a phone call or email away." Participant B-2 also mentioned that this informative email includes an attachment with a list of student services that students can use as a reference sheet throughout the academic year.

Participant B-3 Narrative. Through his experience teaching Guidance courses designed for incoming students, Participant B-3 likes to apply his expertise in answering some basic questions that students often have going into their first academic term as full-time students. He shared, "Each year there is a group of questions that arise during classroom discussion in my Guidance courses … send an email out addressing those typical questions and providing the opportunity to ask additional questions if needed." Participant B-3 added, "If a question that has not been previously addressed and I think it will be valuable in the future, I will add it so that it will be included for the next semester email."

Participant B-4 Narrative. Participant B-4 likes to share her personal experience as a new student with the students she advises in an encouraging email. She stated, "Students tend to forget that you were in their shoes at some point, therefore by addressing you understand how they may feel and sharing how you overcame those feelings can be very beneficial to making a connection with students." Within this "shared experience" email, she also includes a typical "to do" list for students to check off along with links to departments that can assist.

Participant B-5 Narrative. With his department's help, special funding, and donations, Participant B-5 would organize two all-day events the week before the

academic year for students to grab a free meal, get some basic school supplies, and answer some last-second questions. He shared, "Many of our students depend on their financial aid and book and supply vouchers that do not normally kick in until classes start … allows them to go to the first day of class and with some essentials." Participant B-5 added, "Students often are surprised when hearing that people donated supplies, backpacks, and other goodies because they want the students to succeed … realize that they have supporting community members who are willing to invest in their success."

Participant B-6 Narrative. In the last year, Participant B-6 has taken advantage of new software to conduct virtual Q&A meetings with many students to help prepare them for their upcoming classes. She shared, "In this last year, I started conducting a few Zoom sessions before the start of each academic semester to provide students an opportunity for students to ask last-minute questions and any other concerns." In addition, participants B-6 presented the opportunity for other students to answer questions or concerns needing to be addressed to introduce students to each other. As a result, some students feel more comfortable responding to peers.

Participant B-7 Narrative. The week before the start of the semester, Participant B-7 sends a motivating message to her students via email. She shared, "The road to a student's success in the classroom begins before the first day of class … to remind them that even though some doubt may arise, that doubt will soon be erased because they are not alone in their journey." Understanding that not every student is religious, she tries to include an inspirational quote promoting a collaborative effort that may not offend a group of her students.

Question Four

Academic advisors play an integral part during a community college student's movement through the first two pillars of the Guided Pathways program; however, the researcher wanted to understand how (or if) the roles of academic advisors change when these students enter the classroom to fulfill their chosen pathway. Therefore, the researcher asked each participant, "How do you see your role as an academic advisor contributing to the third pillar (i.e., Stay on the Path) of the Guided Pathways program and community college student's continuous success through his or her chosen pathway?"

Participant A-1 Narrative. According to Participant A-1, one of the contributions he provides students is the tools to create a "successful" mindset. He shared, "The thought of success is a mindset that most of our students do not have when they enter our college, so I suggest they create short-term goals both in and out of the classroom." Upon their next meeting, Participant A-1 starts the session with the student by presenting a few of the student's goals and a few that were not completed, adding positive reinforcement and new goals for the next academic semester.

Participant A-2 Narrative. Dealing with many first-generation college students, Participant A-2 acknowledges the opportunity that position puts them to set an example to others from a similar background. She shared, "I like to point out to the student that even though they are just getting started, they are already a role model to others for attending college." Participant A-2 further noted, "When these same students can acknowledge they have self-value, they tend to go into the classroom with a more positive perspective and can envision their long-term success."

Participant A-3 Narrative. One of the methods that Participant A-3 likes to use in assisting students during the third pillar is connecting them with previous students who share a similar background and have experienced self-doubting themselves. He shared, "I try to highlight student success within my area … making connections between past and present students." Participant A-3 added, "Experiencing support from your peers trickles down to a point where students can make a common connection, directly affecting our students who sometimes observe such behavior firsthand." Over the years, he has referred current students to former students who now serve as mentors.

Participant A-4 Narrative. Participant A-4 pointed out that the role of the academic adviser should remain constant throughout every pillar of the Guided Pathways program. She shared, "Most of our students do not have a strong support system, and each doubt creates another opportunity of a detour, which is why I advocate to them that I will be that support they need." Participant A-4 recognizes that her message is not unique or special but instead feels that it is a guideline that all academic advisors should follow to increase the probability of their institution's student success.

Participant A-5 Narrative. Participant A-5 discussed the importance of connecting with the student before the third pillar impacts the academic advisor's role during the third pillar. She shared, "In my opinion, connecting with the student plays a role in whether that student sinks or sails that first year." Participant A-5 feels that by trusting relationships beforehand, students are likely to reach out if they need assistance or be more receptive to responding to "checking in" emails sent to them during the semester.

Participant B-1 Narrative. Participant B-1 did not feel that her role as an advisor changes regardless of where the student is currently on the Guided Pathways spectrum. Instead, she shared, "My role as an advisor is something that just switches 'on and off' when the student reaches out for advice, which is why I need to be in constant communication with them throughout their time at our institution." Participant B-1 acknowledges that the communication can at the time seem "one way," but she argues that that with each one-way attempt by her as an advisor brings the opportunity of a "two-way" conversation occurring.

Participant B-2 Narrative. Participant B-2 argues that as an academic advisor, the third pillar is to reaffirm that he was available when needed by the student. He shared, "Not having a healthy support system at home or school can be detrimental to the student's mental health, especially when there is doubt … cannot underestimate the power of just one person." Participant B-2 added, "Even though I might not get to meet with the student for as much time as I wanted, I have seen how a quick five-minute conversation and a one-minute follow-up can do wonders."

Participant B-3 Narrative. Participant B-3 feels that as an academic advisor, he likes to reassure his students that he is an ally throughout their movement along the third pillar of the Guided Pathway programs. Therefore, even though he wants the student to make at least an attempt to arrange a meeting with their professor, he is not opposed to helping the student by reviewing the message trying to be set. He shared, "Professors can seem intimidating to many of our students, but are willing to help students when needed … a proper email that is clear and concise and helps the student convey the right message."

Participant B-4 Narrative. Unfortunately, Participant B-4's caseload prevents her from meeting with her students on multiple occasions each semester, but she has found other methods to keep in touch with her students. She shared, "Throughout the semester, I will send small polls out to get a quick overview of how my students feel within their classrooms." Participant B-4 likes to take the information gathered to generate an inspirational email and include links to student support resources for students to utilize."

Participant B-5 Narrative. Participant B-5 takes advantage of his smaller caseload by scheduling as many follow-up appointments as he can around the time of mid-terms. He shared, "Meeting with students during the semester allows me to assess better the student's academic progress, at which point I can share with them resources … reminding them that their success is within their grasp and indeed attainable." Participant B-5 added, "When the opportunity arises, I suggest an end of the semester meeting to recap their experience and build upon that experience before they start their next term."

Participant B-6 Narrative. Participant B-6 likes to point to her students the small victories within the classroom that eventually lead to more significant results. She shared, "As a counselor, I like to point out every little success that the student experiences … something as simply passing a math exam can give the student motivation for continued success in that class and other classes." Participant B-6 pointed out that these small gestures of recognition to many students can often lead to their best academic performance.

Participant B-7 Narrative. Understanding the importance of the parental figure to new students, Participant B-7 establishes a rapport with the student's parents. She

shared, **"Since many these kids are still dependent on their parents, as academic advisors,**
we have to 'win over their parents and openly recognize their role in their child's success
in college." Participant B-7 argues, "Once the parents understand you have the best
interest of their child if the child confides to the parents, they having issues … the higher
the probability the parent will guide the student to you for the needed support."

Question Four – Follow-Up #1

Knowing many potential roadblocks for community college students to derail
their academic success during this third pillar stage, the researcher asked each participant
to share some experience concerning this matter by asking, "What are some of the
roadblocks you have experienced from students?"

Participant A-1 Narrative. For Participant A-1, one of the significant roadblocks
he has experienced with students "staying on course" with their selected path is their
language barrier. He stated, "The majority of our students are Hispanic, many of which
are ESL students that struggle causes them to struggle at times in the classroom."
Participant A-1 added, "Even though we have wonderful resources they can access to
help them within the classroom, many are too reluctant to ask for assistance, and their
grades suffer for that." He often tries to promote Spanish-speaking support groups on
campus and connect them early to minimize this.

Participant A-2 Narrative. Participant A-2 mentioned one of the roadblocks she
has encountered in the last year: how many students are reluctant to ask for assistance
when needed or do not know how to ask for help. She shared, "Many of our students
would rather remain silent than ask for assistance, not realizing, in the end, they are only
hurting themselves." Participant A-2 added, "When I asked why the student hesitated to

reach out, many students replied that they were afraid to because of a negative prior experience in either high school or college."

Participant A-3 Narrative. According to Participant A-3, the unpreparedness of students transitioning from high school to community college carries over to the third pillar. He shared, "We as advisors can help students find the best pathways suited for them, but sadly many of our students have floated to the K-12 system and do not understand how to be a student." Participant A-3 further explained, "Although I try to break down basic expectations of them in the classroom, the reality is that each professor has their expectations, which can be very difficult for a student who never had expectations required of them before."

Participant A-4 Narrative. Participant A-4 believes that the student's indecisiveness creates a roadblock to staying on their selected pathway. She shared, "Many students do not give their classes a chance and want to select other classes or even a new pathway without putting any effort in the classroom." Participant A-4 feels that the students do not realize the consequences of changing courses mid-term, as their mindset is still of a high school student. She added, "Students fail to understand dropping and adding classes halfway into their semester only creates more work for them and most likely delays their progress."

Participant A-5 Narrative. In response to this question, Participant A-5 referred to her response of "indecisiveness" of a student being a roadblock to the student's progress. She recalled, "Even after being enrolled after one or two semesters, a student's indecisiveness still exists; unfortunately … opt out of our scheduled meeting, they risk delaying the completion of their original pathway for a minimum of one academic year."

Although she is not against students trying a different pathway, she prefers to be involved in the process.

Participant B-1 Narrative. Participant B-1 felt that a student's language barrier could hinder their growth. She shared, "A small portion of our STEM students are international students, who can exhibit problems from time to time with both oral and written communication." However, Participant B-1 did credit these students for their efforts to reach out when difficulties arose; depending on their understanding of the English language, the more significant the hurdle for the student.

Participant B-2 Narrative. For Participant B-2, ESL students and their families inadvertently create roadblocks to the students' pathway progress. He expressed, "Kids come from homes where English is not the primary language … along with parents' reluctance creates these unnecessary barriers that students need to overcome amongst their other challenges in college." Participant B-2 will take their advice from their parents over his advice because they do not want to disrespect their parents, even if the advice given is to drop out, with the student likely never to return.

Participant B-3 Narrative. According to Participant B-3, the students create roadblocks because they feel they have no support. He shared, "Our students, unfortunately, created barriers because they do not realize they have options … will make self-made decisions without any advice, which often results in consequences." Participant B-3 is often perplexed that students still feel helpless even after he provides them with a list of resources during their initial meeting and follow-up emails.

Participant B-4 Narrative. Participant B-4 noticed the initial unpreparedness about the Guided Pathways program could remain a barrier, detouring their progress,

even after selecting a pathway. She shared, "Asking a student to select a pathway after meeting with the student may be at best one time prior can be an overwhelming task for students … resulting in them just picking a pathway for picking one." Participant B-4 added, "Students will come back maybe a year later and want to change their pathway … in the meantime wasted a year and backtracked their progress."

Participant B-5 Narrative. Avoidance seems to be Participant B-5's most significant concern when dealing with student roadblocks. He shared, "What makes the whole situation more difficult for advisors is that these students often will avoid meeting with us, and rather try to handle making course selection choices themselves, which usually ends with the student being put on academic probation." When the student finally does meet with him because of the probation status, Participant B-5 is often "flabbergasted" on who the student went to for advice, which has included hairdressers, restaurant staff, unemployed acquaintances, gardeners, and even prisoners.

Participant B-6 Narrative. Participant B-6 feels that a student's unawareness of knowing how to succeed in the classroom is the most significant roadblock to their path to success. She shared, "One of the most difficult tasks as an academic advisor is to have students grasp what it takes to succeed in college versus high school … D's can get you a diploma but not a college degree." Participant B-6 does not necessarily blame the new student for having this mindset; however, as adults, she feels they need to take the initiative and responsibility for the necessary change. She added, "For some students, the first year might seem like an academic disaster, but if the student can demonstrate growth in their maturity towards academics, the end goals of success will still occur."

Participant B-7 Narrative. The uncertainty of students wanting to continue on the original pathway selected or to switch to another pathway was the most recognizable roadblock Participant B-7 experienced during her last year as an academic advisor. She shared, "Students sometimes feel that they are required to choose a pathway instantaneously, and feel that they can just hurdle to a different pathway, or even jump back as the process is easy, which is not the case." In her opinion, Participant B-7 would instead take a semester to reflect on their pathways option and confidence with their selection going into their second academic semester.

Question Four – Follow-Up #2

Understanding that as an academic advisor, each participant might have also experienced other roadblocks non-student related that could potentially directly affect a student's progression through the Guided Pathways model, the researcher asked a second follow-up question to the fourth interview question in hopes of identifying such roadblocks. Then, the researcher asked each participant, "What are some of the roadblocks you have experienced from other staff, faculty, or administration?"

Participant 1 Narrative. Participant A-1 identified a few roadblocks he has dealt with regularly in terms of assisting students along their chosen path. He referred to his previous mentioning of the conflict with colleagues or professional differences but added similar events that included faculty and administration. Another roadblock he mentioned was the limited time with students each semester because of his overall caseload. Noteworthy increases occurred during summer and winter intersessions when counseling staff was minimal.

Participant A-2 Narrative. Participant A-2 shared how management's expectations to handle her uncertain caseload and some options with colleagues who are considered faculty have been significant roadblocks experienced within the last year. She shared, "Unlike many of my colleagues, the fluctuation of my caseload changes daily, and I have to advise students from specialized areas and the general population while still meeting the expectations of my colleagues with a significantly lesser caseload." However, participant A-2 added, "One thing does not help when the roadblocks come within our department. Another advisor feels superior in advising because they are considered faculty, as these barriers only hurt the student's progress."

Participant A-3 Narrative. Participant A-3 discussed how the conflict between himself and co-workers goes farther than hurting their relationships but affects college students' success in their academic pathways. He proclaimed, **"**Internal conflicts only act as distractions to our college's goal of student success within their pathways." According to Participant A-3. another roadblock to students' overall success comes from the home front. He added, "Family members who are non-supportive can be extreme roadblocks for our students."

Participant A-4 Narrative. The amount of time Participant A-4 is allowed to work during the intersessions creates a roadblock for many of her student's success. She did acknowledge the others "pick up the slack" because the Administration wants to save money. Still, it only increases the caseload of non-faculty academic advisors and decreases the number of times students get to spend with advisors. Participant A-4 proposed, "Administrators need to realize that having more academic advisors available

during intersessions outweighs the costs of students failing to complete their academic pathways."

Participant A-5 Narrative. Participant A-5 discussed how a consistent increase in her student caseload each year had become a roadblock. She has felt that her administration has frowned upon offering overtime for academic advisors. Still, with the increased caseloads, she is often found working "off the clock" for the sake of the students and their success. She said, "Management discourages us from taking work home with us ... if I depended on just the hours I am physically at the school; many students would feel neglected."

Participant B-1 Narrative. Even though Participant B-1 has a smaller caseload, she understands the importance of the administration intervening when faced with the issue of student caseloads for academic advisors. She shared, "Administration needs to help support its counselors and educational advisors who deal with the general public without already high caseloads, as the number of students responsible fluctuates noticeably." Participant B-1 has colleagues with over 1200 students they are responsible for during the intersessions.

Participant B-2 Narrative. Participant B-2 discussed how the pressures of his management team continuously increasing his student caseload had affected the time he had available to advise students and made him worry about others in his position potentially experiencing workplace burnout. He shared, "Last year, my student caseload increased by nearly 200 students … The administration needs to do something to make sure there is better management of caseloads; otherwise, we will have advisors who will experience burnout." Participant B-2 is worried that if things do not change in student

caseloads, his institution risks the loss of seasoned academic advisors, hurting its students' chances of success.

Participant B-3 Narrative. According to Participant B-3, the high schools where new students graduate pose a roadblock to the student's success. He shared, "High schools not preparing their students for college is a common roadblock I have seen … seems as if they have just given them that diploma and give them their best wishes on whatever they decided post-high school." Participant B-5 argues that college administrators need to improve their partnerships with these high schools and get their "buy-in" for promoting the Guided Pathways program.

Participant B-4 Narrative. Participant B-4 shared how conflict with other academic advisors in front of students has negatively impacted students' faith in advisors. She shared, "We need to isolate ourselves when we argue about disagreements in advising in the presence of students; we fail the students and potentially lose their trust with us as advisors and the college." Participant B-4 also mentioned that a student's home life could be another roadblock to success within the Guided Pathways program. She expressed, "Not having the home support also is a common barrier for our students, as they can be pressured to drop out of college to help out the family with financial matters or help out around the household."

Participant B-5 Narrative. Conflict with colleagues has also been a roadblock experienced by Participant B-5. He shared, "It is hard to advise students and to help them pick a pathway and then having another member of my team talking the student into reconsidering other pathways because of a difference of opinion without even talking to

me." Participant B-5 added how administrative has often "wiped their hands" when he has brought up conflicts with other academic advisors.

Participant B-6 Narrative. Like her co-workers, Participant B-6 has identified differences in student caseloads as a considerable roadblock to ensuring student success in Guided Pathways. According to Participant B-6, the difference in others' opinions is not the only issue; instead, the lack of recognition of academic advisors with larger caseloads is demoralizing. She shared, "Recognition is important for employee morale, but recognition can also affect those not being recognized." Participant has noticed a pattern of her colleagues with significantly lower student caseloads being the advisors continuously praised by the administration.

Participant B-7 Narrative. Participant B-7 identified a few non-student-related roadblocks that still directly affect students she faced during her time as an academic advisor. The first roadblock was from student caseload, which fluctuated throughout the year. Participant B-7 shared, "Having to deal with the ongoing issues of an increased workload and trying to meet the needs of each student I advise has affected how I would like to build a relationship." In addition, Participant B-7 recounted, "One of the most discouraging things that as an academic advisor is seeing when others include you in emails to our bosses or co-workers about an incident … my intention was never to steer a student away …"

Question Five

The academic advisor plays a significant role in the student's progression to the fourth and final pillar of Guided Pathways. The researcher wanted to understand each participant's level of accountability regarding the student's classroom success. Therefore,

the researcher asked, "What type of accountability do you hold for yourself concerning community college students and their overall success in the classroom?"

Participant 1 Narrative. During his follow-up meetings with the students he advises, Participant A-1 commonly finds himself asking about their status in the class and solicits the students to learn about what they have learned. "Once the student starts sharing their new knowledge, there is an instant sense of self-belief in themselves … want to share something new during our next meeting without me asking. "He mentioned how he intakes the shared knowledge and gives recommendations to the student for future classes that fit into the student's schedule and are transferrable for when the student moves on to a four-year college or university.

Participant A-2 Narrative. Participant A-2 likes to send multiple generic emails to each student she advises each semester, including a reminder of a list of resources available to each student. However, she did note that she does not get as much one-on-one time with each student as we would like because of her more extensive caseload of students. Participant A-2 stated, "Sometimes I wish I had just a few more minutes with each student."

Participant A-3 Narrative. Participant A-3 discussed that he takes advantage of having a smaller student caseload than his equivalent in other departments, which allows him to be confirmatory on multiple occasions throughout the academic semester. He said, "I liked to continuously be engaged with all of my students, whether an email or a quick phone call to check in." Furthermore, Participant A-3 enthusiastically shared, "I am lucky to have more time than most when meeting one-on-one with my student throughout the year. The results of each of those meetings show retention levels."

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Participant A-4 Narrative. For accountability purposes for her students, Participant A-4 mentioned how she promotes the "it takes a village to raise a child" mentality. In addition, participant A discussed, "Internal support from the different areas of my college is correlational to the support I can promote to my students, so I make sure to confirmatory with a student's other areas of support to make sure we are discussed aligned to promote that student's success." Ideally, she likes to connect with her students' other support groups at least once a semester, usually around midterms.

Participant A-5 Narrative. Participant A-5 discussed how in a "perfect world," she would be able to meet face-to-face multiple times during an academic semester. Still, a caseload of over 1,000 students prevents her from doing so. She stated, "My large caseload affects my opportunity to meet with students face-to-face more than I would like to, so I have used other options for communication to show I care." Such mechanisms mentioned included encouraging emails during holidays, mid-term exams, and finals, which included links to resources that could provide the face-to-face meetings that a portion of her students benefits more from.

Participant B-1 Narrative. Participant B-1 shared two different mindsets that she tries to instill in the students each semester. First, she stated, "If you can get these kids to understand success is within their grasp in the classroom, and remind them of available resources, the better chance in them succeeding in and out of the classroom." Second, Participant B-1 avidly believes in the power of positive reinforcement. She further explained, "I try not to use the word failure but rather tell my students that they might experience setbacks that they can learn and move forward from."

Participant B-2 Narrative. Participant B-2 discussed the importance of academic advisors letting students know they have a support system outside of the classroom, which might be their only form of support on some bases. He shared, "There is no denying that the influence that one's support has on one's success in the classroom, and ironically it comes at no financial cost to the supporting party but rather at solely the cost of time." Support is even more crucial for students who might have experienced a subpar academic semester. Participant B-2 stated that an advisor must "Make an effort to engage students who did poorly during their first academic semester … look for options to end the year with the successful semester and for the student to build confidence."

Participant B-3 Narrative. Participant B-3 believes in sharing the accountability of the student's success in the Guided Pathways with the student. She noted, "One of the messages that I try to convey to the students that I advise and the students in my Guidance courses is that accountability is shared, and efforts must be made from both sides." She admits that this approach might seem harsh to others, but taking this route helps students take responsibility early on in their academic journey.

Participant B-4 Narrative. Participant B-4 shared how she is delighted when students recognize her as their support system, thus holding her accountable. She stated, "Many students come back to me when they are unsure about what they should do when struggling in the classroom, so it's satisfying to know that I am someone they can confide with and ask for advice regularly." For Participant B-4, being accountable establishes relationships with her students and more opportunities to engage and work towards their success along their pathway.

Participant B-5 Narrative. Participant B-5 understands that he needs to be accountable for checking in on each student he advises continuously throughout the semester. Therefore, he said, "I like to send out motivational messages periodically to my students … let them know I am there to support and think of them and believe in them and their academic and life goals." Even though Participant B-5 acknowledged that only a tiny minority of his students respond to his periodic encouraging emails, he is pleased to see that a significant majority of them take the time to at least read each email.

Participant B-6 Narrative. Participant B-6 boasted how she goes "above and beyond" with her accountability for her students' success. She mentioned, "The difference between me and others in my position regarding student engagement is that I do not clock out when my schedule time off ... if the student is up studying, I am responding to student emails." During the tail end of the spring semester, when the pandemic caused all courses to go online, she worked countless hours after the clock to assist struggling students on the verge of dropping out.

Participant B-7 Narrative. Participant B-7 tends to take a personal approach when dealing with the issue of accountability. She clarified, "The lack of advising made it difficult for me throughout my educational experience, so I support students from an approach opposite from what I experienced firsthand when I was in their situation." This approach has seemed practical, as over 80% of the new students we advised last year are returning for the next academic year.

Question Six

To solicit feedback from each participant regarding the AB 705 initiative that had been in place for one academic year within the California community college system, the

researcher asked, "In your opinion, has it helped or hindered the ideals of the California Guided Pathways initiative? How so?"

Participant A-1 Narrative. In general, Participant A-1 felt that the implementation of AB 705 has had its benefits, but because the policy is still in its infancy, a father review is likely needed. "From what I can see, AB 705 allows most of our students who would otherwise be trapped in remedial classes to take classes for their pathways without any semester or year delay." Participant A-1 also felt that the introduction of AB 705 helped students who may suffer from test anxiety and would otherwise have lower placement based on their assessment scores that did not project their true potential.

Participant A-2 Narrative. Participant A-2 felt that the AB 705 has been more beneficial than detrimental to student success; however, she did not feel she could adequately assess the situation, considering her lack of experience as an academic advisor before the AB 705. She shared, "By the time that AB 705 was implemented in the fall, I had only been in my new role as an academic advisor for a few months; therefore, it would be difficult to assess the 'before properly and after' AB 705 from a mere academic advisor's perspective."

Participant A-3 Narrative. Participant A-3 truly feels that AB 705 has helped what Guided Pathways is designed to do. "One of the 'pluses' of the Guided Pathways program is to deter community college students from staying what seems like a 'lifetime' at the college, and AB 705 helps minimize the chances of this occurring." He mentioned that if there were drawbacks to AB 705, he would have yet to experience them.

Participant A-4 Narrative. Participant A-4 shared how she felt both pros and cons to AB 705 regarding the Guided Pathways program. She commented, "One pro is that students do not have to wait to take a class requiring a certain English placement to take a course that might be linked to their major and selected path. But one con is that some students think they can bypass meeting with us and try to select course schedules on their own that would typically be unadvised."

Participant A-5 Narrative. Participant A-5 felt that passing AB 705 would help most California community college students and the Guided Pathways program, but some still want not to benefit. She cautioned, "It is great that students will not be stuck in remedial classes because of AB 705 and will be able to move along their chosen pathway, but the bigger problem will be if California community colleges cannot provide the courses." Based on her personal opinion, in the last school year, there were still too many limited courses offered at her institution related to the ideals of AB 705.

Participant B-1 Narrative. From Participant B-1's perspective, AB 705 brings a "step in the right" direction for community college students introduced to the Guided Pathways program. She mentioned, "The purpose of the Guided Pathways program is to reduce the current rate of time students spend at the community college level, and the AB 705 helps the colleges to move in that direction." In addition, Participant B-1 added, "Not only does AB 705 helps current community college students, but future students too because courses that would have been impacted with students in their third or fourth year at the college will likely not occur."

Participant B-2 Narrative. Based on his experience within the California community college system, Participant B-2 was confident that implementing AB 705

would help the long-term goals of the Guided Pathways program. He noted, "Before AB 705, I often met with students who wanted to take courses but were prohibited because of their assessment scores." Participant B-2 added that although AB 705 creates a new possibility of a new "cafeteria" approach, the Guided Pathways program minimizes the same results.

Participant B-3 Narrative. Participant B-3 believed that the implementation of AB 705 benefits outweighed its drawbacks concerning the Guided Pathways program. As noted by Participant B-3, "AB 705 helps our students establish confidence in themselves, as they are being trusted to make their own academic decisions for certain courses." Still, he felt the biggest drawback is that some students will be influenced by their peers, which can have negative repercussions."

Participant B-4 Narrative. Participant B-4 could see the long-term benefits of the Guided Pathways program at California community colleges with the introduction of AB 705. She expressed, "The biggest drawbacks of the old assessment process at our institution were that our students could not re-test for one academic year, giving them the option of waiting out a year or just taking classes." Participant B-4 further explained, "With AB 705, students are being set up for success, rather than given many opportunities to fail regarding their pathway."

Participant B-5 Narrative. Participant B-5 argues that AB 705 has benefited the Guided Pathways program. He specified, "One benefit AB 705 did was eliminate certain requirements for non-math and non-English courses that had previously required placement levels." In addition, Participant B-5 mentioned that the options for both

significant and elective courses had grown noticeably without having this barrier anymore.

Participant B-6 Narrative. Participant B-6 believes AB 705 has helped the success of the Guided Pathways program. She stated, "One positive thing that the AB 705 did was eliminate the positive assessment test requirements that could hurt an incoming student who was not good test takers and would normally be able to take college-level courses within their first year." Participant B-6 argued that a low assessment score could derail a new student's academic experience before AB 705 started. With AB 705, students no longer have to worry about this happening.

Participant B-7 Narrative. Participant B-7 was very confident that AB 705 only helps what the Guided Pathways program does. She noted, "The Guided Pathways is designed for our students to complete their education between two and three years, which had been a big problem for most community college students before AB 705 because they were stuck taking so many remedial classes." Participant B-7 added that they work "hand and hand" with each other for student success.

Question Six – Follow-Up

Since the new AB 705 initiative might have impacted their advising of incoming high school students, the researcher asked each participant, "How has AB 705 changed your role and thinking as an academic advisor for incoming community college transitioning from high school?"

Participant A-1 Narrative. There was one aspect in which Participant A-1 felt AB 705 has changed how he advises. He stated how his institution's suggestion to have students take math and English courses simultaneously could pose a problem for many

students. "I am optimistic but realistic and do not want to set up students to be overwhelmed and fail. Therefore, my advice may vary depending on the students when this situation arises."

Participant A-2 Narrative. Participant A-2 reminded the researcher that she did not believe she could adequately respond to AB 705-related questions due to a lack of academic advising experience before implementing the policy. However, as an advisor, Participant A-2 commented that because of AB 705, she has encouraged students to get out of their "safe zone." Participant A-2 discussed, "AB 705 provides the opportunity for students to challenge themselves for maybe the first time as a student. Therefore, as an academic advisor, I push for them to step up and prove to others and, more importantly, themselves that they can do it."

Participant A-3 Narrative. Participant A-3 discussed how he tries to instill in the students the opportunities that AB 705 provides positively and encouragingly. He noted, "I try to help the student believe in their abilities, even when they do not believe in their abilities themselves, as failure is not an option." For Participant A-3, this positive mindset has been an overall success, with his students questioning whether they could complete a course AB 705 allowed them to take.

Participant A-4 Narrative. From the eyes of Participant A-4, the inclusion of AB 705 has not changed her style of advising at all. She stated, "I always encouraged the students I advise to challenge themselves academically, which means if they feel they can take a course with the right support, we add that course to their schedule." Thus, participant A-4 feels that, if anything, AB 705 runs parallel with her advising.

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Participant A-5 Narrative. Participant A-5 stated that since AB 705 was established in the previous fall term, she has often had to change how she advises her working students. She said, "Unfortunately, many of the students I counsel are young working adults who can only attend school at night or online. Most AB 705 impacted courses related to one's pathways are only offered during the day or are full when the student registers." This dilemma has made Participant A-5 try to find resources or groups that these students would qualify for priority registration for the following academic semester.

Participant B-1 Narrative. Being an academic advisor for STEM students whose pathways require more mathematics classes than all other pathways, Participant B-1 mentioned how AB 705 has slightly changed her typical advising approach. According to Participant B-1, "Before AB 705, I would often recommend that my students do not overwhelm themselves with both an English and math course, but in this last year, I have had to suggest this for many students." She mentioned that the only alternative for STEM students to avoid this situation is to take one or more math classes during the intersessions. However, some math courses are not always offered.

Participant B-2 Narrative. Participant B-2 argued that he is confident in his advising methods, to which AB 705 has not changed how he advises incoming students. He stated, "If I was an advisor who just wanted to put students in any class, new policy AB 705 might help, but I expect more out of my students and have instilled on them to aim higher than what was expected of them; in high school."

Participant B-3 Narrative. Participant B-3 does believe that AB 705 has barely changed his view in advising incoming students in course selection. He mentioned,

"Before AB 705 came about, when a student questioned whether or not they could take a course, I would ask a few background questions and outline all of the resources available for that student's success, including myself, and encourage them to aim high." Participant B-3 admitted that AB 705 coincides with his goal for students to move forward, ultimately leading to their success within the Guided Pathways program.

Participant B-4 Narrative. Participant B-4 personally did not feel that the implementation of AB 705 affects how she advises incoming students. According to Participant B-4, "AB 705 has helped eliminate many remedial classes that I normally have advised my students to avoid anyways." She has personally felt once a student started taking one remedial class, they only prolonged their academic journey by at least one year.

Participant B-5 Narrative. Participant B-5 commented that he did not notice any change in his advising of community college students with AB 705 starting during the Fall 2019 semester. He mentioned, "The group of students that I advise have an advantage over other students and were probably one of the least affected students with AB 705 considering a significant majority of them are already taking college-level English and math courses." However, Participant B-5 added that he has noticed how some of his other colleagues at the school have changed because they work with the general student population.

Participant B-6 Narrative. Participant B-6 hesitated to say that AB 705 changed her advising methods toward incoming students. However, she stated, "As a counselor, I have always pushed incoming students to get out of their comfort zone of high school and

apply themselves instead of taking the alternative route and taking remedial courses when they have options."

Participant B-7 Narrative. Participant B-7 still considers herself relatively new in her role as her academic advisor and did not think that the integration of AB 705 had directly affected how she advises as she is in a "learning phase." However, she stated, "Guided Pathways and AB 705 were ingrained in me when I transitioned to my current position as an advisor, so it is hard to answer this question."

Question Seven

Acknowledging that the ideology of continuous improvement can be beneficial to any program targeting long-term success, the concept of the Guided Pathways being relatively new to the California community college system, the researcher asked each participant to reflect on their experience with the Guided Pathways program so far. Then the researcher proposed the question, "If given the opportunity to change (i.e., add, delete, or expand) one of the four pillars to improve the program and its overall success rates within the California community college system. Why?"

Participant A-1 Narrative. Participant A-1 mentioned that he felt that the current structure of the four pillars seems to suffice with the Guided Pathways program. He further noted how the program in its current format has demonstrated success all over the nation and will continue to be successful in the design as long as the right people are there to promote the program's benefits. Participant A-1 added, "The Guided Pathways can excel in the California community college system under its current format. We got to change our California culture in which one group feels only their opinion or direction matters, and rather it is a team effort."

Participant A-2 Narrative. Participant A-2 felt that the Guided Pathways program's four-pillar approach does work efficiently, and there is nothing that she could think of that she would change at the moment. She reflected, "From what I have experienced so far, I think it works pretty well under its current format; thus, I would not change anything." However, participant A-3 did agree that her position could change if progressive results fail to show over the next couple of years at her institution.

Participant A-3 Narrative. Participant A-3 responded with an immediate "Nothing" when asked the question. When the researcher attempted to get further clarification from Participant A-3 for his response, another vague answer was provided "Because it works!" He offered no other follow-up to his response.

Participant A-4 Narrative. At the time of the interview, Participant A-4 informed the researcher that she could not answer this question in the future. Participant A-4 stated, "Being that I have only been working with Guided Pathways for one year, it is all still new to me, and I cannot think of anything at the moment that I would change." However, she did feel if she were asked this question again in a few years, she might have some suggestions.

Participant A-5 Narrative. Participant A-5 believes that the first pillar needs to expand and be incorporated and supported by the surrounding public schools. She stated, "Normally, I do not want to be negative or like to harp on the K-12 public school system, but they need to work with us for our students' future academic plans." Participant A-5 believed that working in a collaborative effort with the K-12 districts would enormously benefit students' success within the Guided Pathways program from beginning to end.

Participant B-1 Narrative. Although Participant B-1 could not think of any changes to the current four-pillar structure of the Guided Pathways program, she did suggest that there needs to be some intervention from the State to help with the program's success. She expressed, "For Guided Pathways to work as they [the State] want it to work, there needs to be an increase in financial support to all students and not just specific groups." Participant B-1 was adamant that the funding should be available and looked at as an investment rather than a liability.

Participant B-2 Narrative. Participant B-2 quickly suggested that adding a "pre" pillar that introduces the Guided Pathways program might be helpful because of what he has experienced with the number of unprepared students. He mentioned, "Right now, students are set up to fail before they even begin the community college level, let alone have any idea which pathway to choose, which can be directed back to their time spent in high school." This "pre" pillar would be aimed to at least high school seniors according to Participant B-2.

Participant B-3 Narrative. Participant B-3 felt that the current format of the Guided Pathways program works and did not have any suggestions of how the program could improve. However, he noted, "There are no complaints from me, most definitely an improvement from the old cafeteria approach I dealt with when I was in community college."

Participant B-4 Narrative. Participant B-4 seemed content with the current format adequately promoted students' success and had no suggestions on how the Guided Pathways program could be improved. She added, "The program is designed to reduce the time California community college students to 'actually' the average time our college

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students were originally designed to be at our institutions, which is a plus." Participant B-4 included that in her 10+ years in her position, the Guided Pathways program has been the one program introduced that she has felt optimistic about its long-term success.

Participant B-5 Narrative. Participant B-5 felt that the pandemic put a "wrench" on how he approached this answer. He stated, "I think I would need to look at one regular or non-pandemic year to determine how effective our institution was this last academic year and whether or not changes would be needed." Participant B-5 further explained that students typically would have otherwise been successful with the in-person classes they scheduled initially, struggled with their transition to the online format, or were impacted by job loss or lack of resources when everything shut down.

Participant B-6 Narrative. Like her colleague, Participant B-6 did not feel there needed to be any changes in the current model for the Guided Pathways program but needed additional financial assistance to increase the chances of the program's overall success. However, she had a different opinion on where this new funding should be allocated. Participant B-6 proclaimed, "Sacramento wants continued results, but at the current student growth rate, the community colleges need more advisors who can lower the average caseloads of each advisor; even providing funding for just a few more advisors at each college would show a worthy ROI."

Participant B-7 Narrative. Participant B-7 felt that she needed at least one to two more years working with the Guided Pathways program before making any suggestions for change. In addition, she thought the program itself was relatively new to her institution. She explained, "There have been a lot of recent changes within my institution, including Guiding Pathways and AB 705, and the full transition to online

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because of COVID-19, so in my professional opinion, I do not know if I could suggest this time."

Question Eight

For the interview's final question, the researcher first described theorist Michael Lipsky's concept of "street-level bureaucrats" and the expected behavior exhibited by such individuals when dealing with the public. After this information was provided to each participant, the researcher asked them to reflect on their role as an academic advisor and proposed the question, "Would you identify yourself as a "street-level bureaucrat" when it comes to your decision-making for students within the Guided Pathways program? Why or why not?"

Participant A-1 Narrative. Upon being asked the question about "street-level bureaucrats," Participant A-1 stated he believed he could identify as one within his current role as an academic advisor. In his opinion, he felt that most public servants have been in a situation in which they had to exhibit common traits of a "street-level bureaucrat."

Participant A-2 Narrative. Although Participant A-2 admittedly stated that she exhibited some of the "street-level bureaucrat" traits in the description, she would not identify herself as a "street-level bureaucrat." According to Participant A-2, "Although I may argue that some of the policies and procedures might be vague and outdated, and change is required, I still uphold the policies and procedures when advising students." However, she still felt she had enough freedom in her decision-making to guide the students to succeed within such restrictions.

Participant A-3 Narrative. Unfortunately, Participant A-3 could not decide whether he would identify if he considered himself a "street-level bureaucrat." He asked the researcher to repeat Lipsky's description of the "street-level bureaucrat" and asked for about a minute to "think about it." After a few minutes, Participant A-3 apologized because he was unable to decide at this time whether he would identify himself as a "street-level bureaucrat."

Participant A-4 Narrative. Like Participant A-3, Participant A-4 could not identify whether she would classify herself as a "street-level bureaucrat." Although Participant A-4 feels that she uses her discretion when advising students, when it comes to limited knowledge about the Guided Pathways program, she often follows the guidelines provided by her superiors. Participant A-4 stated, "Guided Pathways is just too new to me to make what I guess you would call 'street-level bureaucratic' type of decisions."

Participant A-5 Narrative. Participant A-5 admitted that she had previously heard the term "street-level bureaucrat" used but never knew its meaning. She further explained that based on the brief description of the word and its origins, she would identify as a "street-level bureaucrat" when coming to Guided Pathways-related decisions. Participant A-5 added, "When it comes to my decisions, I will do what I need to do that is in the best interest of the students, not just in Guided Pathways, but for any other advising as well."

Participant B-1 Narrative. Although Participant B-1 mentioned that she was presented with different circumstances that often required a "degree of discretion," she is unsure whether or not she would necessarily identify herself as a "street-level bureaucrat"

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concerning Guided Pathways. Participant B-1 noted to the researcher, "Even though you gave a brief description of what a 'street-level bureaucrat' is, I would like to research more on the topic before making a decision." Upon researching the ideals of Lipsky's "street-level bureaucracy," Participant B-1 would be open to being re-asked the question.

Participant B-2 Narrative. Without hesitation, Participant B-2 agreed that he would identify as a "street-level bureaucrat." Upon reflection of his time at his current institution, he argued that one must take accountability at times for progress to happen. In the eyes of Participant B-2, "Sometimes it is 'game-time,' and you have no coach and have to make an immediate decision for the player in front of you, and you as unfavorable as it might seem to others."

Participant B-3 Narrative. Participant B-3 mentioned to the researcher that even though Guided Pathways is still in its infancy at her institution, her decision-making experience pre-Guided Pathways factors in. She expressed, "Guided Pathways may be new, so I must rely on my 'open-minded' mentality when it comes to how each student, on a case-by-case basis, and do what is best for them." Therefore, Participant B-3 declared she would consider herself a "street-level bureaucrat."

Participant B-4 Narrative. Participant B-4 acknowledged being previously introduced to Lipsky's "street-level bureaucrat" term during her graduate program. However, according to Participant B-4, "I feel I have identified with this term even before I read about it in graduate school." She further explained, "Rules and policies should be progressive, and when they are not, someone has to make the correct decision, which holds for our struggling students trying to find their path.

Participant B-5 Narrative. According to Participant B-5, if he had to make a choice now, he would tend to choose "yes." However, participant B-5 confessed, "As an academic advisor, you must have some sense of autonomy when making decisions for your students." Furthermore, Participant B-5 added, "This mentality should not change with Guided Pathways decisions or anything else that the State comes up shortly."

Participant B-6 Narrative. Like her colleague, Participant B-6 confessed that she needed more time and knowledge about Lipsky's "street-level bureaucracy" term before deciding. She expressed, "Part of me wants to say 'yes,' while part of me wants to say 'no,' as I just do not know if I can provide an accurate answer to this question."

Participant B-7 Narrative. Participant B-7 had a slight pause when asked the question. She then commented how she might have identified herself as a "street-level bureaucrat" in previous public sector positions but not in a current role as an academic advisor. Participant B-7, "When it comes to Guided Pathways, I perform according to how I am expected to, which should be in parallel with the state's expectations.