

## Claremont Colleges Scholarship @ Claremont

---

Pitzer Senior Theses

Pitzer Student Scholarship

---

2018

# The Educational Opportunity Structure and Stratification of College Counseling at Southern California Public High Schools

Adriana Ceron

---

### Recommended Citation

Ceron, Adriana, "The Educational Opportunity Structure and Stratification of College Counseling at Southern California Public High Schools" (2018). *Pitzer Senior Theses*. 87.  
[http://scholarship.claremont.edu/pitzer\\_theses/87](http://scholarship.claremont.edu/pitzer_theses/87)

This Open Access Senior Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Pitzer Student Scholarship at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pitzer Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact [scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu](mailto:scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu).

THE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE AND STRATIFICATION OF  
COLLEGE COUNSELING AT SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

---

A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
Pitzer College

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Arts  
in  
Sociology

---

By  
Adriana M. Ceron

Approved By:

Dr. Roberta Espinoza, Professor of Sociology  
Pitzer College

Dr. Azamat Junisbai, Associate Professor of Sociology  
Pitzer College

APRIL 2018

© Adriana Ceron, 2018

## ABSTRACT

This study documents how organizational strategies underlying college counseling departments modify counselors' ability to perform their academic and college advising duties. To examine this, fifteen semi-structured, in-depth interviews with public high school counselors in Southern California were conducted. A district's commitment to college access and opportunity, as well as parents' expectations for maintaining a college-going culture, shaped the nature of college counseling and organizational habitus in a school. Counselors reported that access to different forms of institutional support and resources diminish or exacerbate the structural constraints known to surface in public schools. This influenced when and how counselors advised students, which offered different views of the educational opportunity structure. Additionally, findings indicate that both college preparation programs and culturally sensitive counselors work to remedy educational disparities and increase the college enrollment rates of working-class minority students.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	4
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	5
Organization of this Thesis.....	9
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
Multiple Forms of Capital.....	10
Counselors as Institutional Agents.....	13
Structural Constraints in College Counseling Departments.....	16
External Factors that Shape Counseling.....	18
3. METHODOLOGY.....	21
Participants and School Sites.....	21
Procedure.....	23
Interview Protocol.....	23
Positionality.....	25
4. RESULTS.....	26
External Entities and their Influence on College Counseling.....	26
Different Schools, Different Organizational Habitus.....	32
Addressing Educational Inequities through College Preparatory Programs.....	39
A Labor of Love.....	42
5. DISCUSSION.....	48
6. CONCLUSION.....	52
Shortcomings and Future Research.....	54
APPENDIX.....	55
REFERENCES.....	57

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the mentorship, guidance, and support from my research advisor, Dr. Roberta Espinoza. I am extremely thankful for all of the opportunities that you have exposed me to. They have positively influenced my educational trajectory as a first-generation college student. Thank you for exposing me to a career in research and academia. I hope to one day be a pivotal moment educator just like you.

I am also fortunate to have been mentored and advised by a number of thoughtful and caring scholars. I would like to thank Dr. Azamat Junisbai, my second thesis reader, for his advice and comments on my research. I am also thankful to Dr. Suyapa Portillo, whose guidance and support have shaped me into a better student and scholar. Special thanks to Pitzer's sociology field group and professors Cynthia Alcantar, Adrian Pantoja, and Jose Calderon.

I am deeply grateful to the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF) program for financially supporting my research and investing in my academic success. My time as an MMUF Fellow has been phenomenal. I cherish the memories made with the Mellon's at the Claremont Colleges and those around the U.S., including South Africa. When times were rough and the research process was frustrating, I always had their support. Once a Mellon, always a Mellon.

I vividly remember spending my lunch and after school time in the college center at my high school. My college counselor would share to my friends and me the responsibilities that came along with being a college advisor. I am grateful for those conversations as they later sparked the basis of this research project. Consequently, this thesis would not have been possible without the counselors who took time out of their busy schedules to talk to me about their experiences as educators. Your roles as counselors are so important, and I hope to highlight your stories and narratives throughout my thesis.

I also cherish my family and friends at Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA). You all gave me the tools, guidance, and encouragement to apply to Pitzer College. HOLA will always hold a very close place in my heart. My friends at Pitzer have also made college more bearable. I am grateful to the mentorship of upperclassmen, currently Pitzer students, affinity clubs, and the staff at the Office of Admissions.

Lastly, thank you to my parents, Marta Ochoa and Jubal Antonio Ceron, and my grandmother, Elba, the most important teachers in my life. Thank you to Milly, my best friend, who I have been fortunate to know for the past 17 years. You are my person.

This would not have been possible without you all.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*I should've went and talked to my counselor about applying to colleges early and for her to help me. 'Cause right now, I'm like, I'm really struggling through, like, applying to it, and the money thing...*

Karesoma, or as his friends called him, Soma, is a Pacific Islander high school senior at Paramount High School in Southern California. He poses the statement above while reflecting on his college application process. At school, Soma is like any one of his peers. He is an academically motivated student who aspires to attend the University of Southern California (USC) and one day become an engineer. Outside of the classroom, he is involved in various activities, including leadership positions as a two-sport athlete and the President of the P.I. (Pacific Islander) Club. At home, however, he shares a different story. Soma's father passed away recently and now lives in a single-parent household with his siblings. Nevertheless, his family's situation motivates him to pursue a college education because he knows it would have made his father proud—Soma would be the first person in his family to pursue a four-year university. Even though he is unsure of how to achieve his college goals because his family is not acquainted with the college application process, he is still determined to find a way to get there.

Soma is one of the four students featured in the documentary *First-Generation*, which explores the educational trajectory of high school students. This award-winning film follows Cecilia, Dontay, Jess, and Soma who hope to become the first person in their extended family to apply and attend a four-year college or university in the United States (Fenderson and Fenderson 2011). Particularly, the film unearths what it means to be a first-generation college goer and the barriers that students have to overcome to attend a postsecondary institution. It nicely

demonstrates that working-class minority youth and first-generation college students are often unable to turn to their family as a source of information about college and financial aid because they are not acquainted with higher education (Espinoza 2011). This lack of college-related information can be a potential academic barrier for working-class students (Kao and Tienda 1998).

As the college application season begins to approach, first-generation college students find themselves lost, misinformed, and hungry for answers; often, they have to navigate this process on their own (Ceja 2006). The “I wish I would have” or the “I wish I had known” statements become too common. For instance, Soma shares that he wished he had talked to his counselor ahead of time about applying to colleges because now he is “really struggling” with the process. The film shows Soma as a senior in high school meeting with his counselor and discussing the next steps to take in the college admission process. For students who cannot go to their family for college guidance, a high school counselor can play a pivotal role in helping students maneuver the intricacies of applying to a two-year or four-year institution. They have the potential to be the college educated adult who transmits the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) that correlates with college attainment and enrollment (McDonough 1997; Ceja 2006; Stanton-Salazar 2001; Gonzalez et al. 2003; Espinoza 2011; Stanton-Salazar 2011; Belasco 2013; Robinson and Roksa 2016).

Later in the film we learn that Soma’s dreams of applying and attending USC did not become a reality. His counselor informed him *too late* that he did not have the prerequisites to qualify for admissions at USC, and so he only applied to the California State University (CSU). Had the college counselor guided Soma early during the application process, he may have had the opportunity to submit an application to USC. Espinoza (2011) argues that having an early

academic intervention (before the 10<sup>th</sup> grade) from a college-educated adult allows working-class and first-generation college students to navigate the educational system and get a head-start in developing the behaviors that will enhance academic success (Espinoza 2011). After learning about Soma's college application process, a few questions began to arise: Did Soma have an early academic intervention from his counselor, or did he start meeting with her after 10th grade? How often did he meet with his counselor to discuss graduation and college requirements, financial aid, and the application process? How many counselors were available to guidance and advice students?

Underresourced schools and the community in which they are located continue to be a significant predictor of disparities in college counseling departments, as seen in Soma's high school experience (National Association of College Admission Counselors 2004). Literature on college counseling indicates that students who need the most help are receiving the least, while non-minority youth and students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds benefit significantly from strong college counseling departments (Lee and Ekstrom 1987; McDonough 2005; Bridgeland and Bruce 2011; Hurley and Coles 2015). In contrast, working-class students in public high schools are less likely to have access to a counselor, most likely to have underprepared counselors, and most likely to have counselors pulled away to work on non-counselor tasks (Lee and Ekstrom 1987).

Scholars have attributed these differences to the college-going culture in schools. Robinson and Roksa (2016) describe this as the "college-linking resources and college opportunity structure of high schools that promote college enrollment" (p. 849). Schools with a prominent college-going culture tend to have more proactive college counseling and a plethora of resources that they can offer students. Proactive college counselors foster close relationships



with youth and devote more time in alleviating the stress that comes with choosing a college (McDonough 1998). On the other hand, schools with a low college-going culture have fewer resources allocated to college counseling, conversations about college occur late, and students are steered towards less selective colleges and universities, such as two-year institutions (Robinson and Roksa 2016). For this reason, research studies and policy reports have selected improving college counseling as a top reform to positively influence college access for working-class minority youth (McDonough 2005).

This research study situates itself among discussions on educational inequality in the U.S. and access to higher education. Its goal is not to assess or judge individual counselors' effectiveness, but rather to present a nuanced perspective of how college counseling and advising is organized and structured in schools. The main source of data was collected through conducting 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with counselors in Southern California public high schools during 2017-18. The interviews were audio recorded, fully transcribed, and thematically coded on HyperResearch. The central question of the study explores: How do organizational strategies underlying college counseling departments modify college counselors' ability to perform their college-advising duties? The study focused on five topical areas: a counselor's career, guidance operations, parental involvement, school demographics, and school and district policies.

This project is theoretically significant because it can positively inform policy and practice. Specifically, this study highlights how college counseling in public high schools can either create an avenue for educational mobility or exacerbate inequities. It exposes the (in)adequate resources and support that districts funnel down to schools and counseling departments, which contributes to a school's organizational structure that can facilitate or hinder

a counselor's ability to perform their advising duties. Furthermore, it highlights the role of college preparatory programs and counselors who go above and beyond their role to provide the extra support that students need to succeed. This study can inform educational practitioners about the need to decrease student-to-counselor ratios, increase a secure budget for college counseling departments in public schools, and implement new courses on college counseling, admission, and financial aid for counseling programs in graduate school.

### Organization of this Thesis

In the following five chapters, I analyze the educational opportunity structure and stratification of college counseling in public high schools. Chapter two reviews literature on the multiple forms of capital to understand how counselors, as institutional agents, transmit nonfamilial forms of social and cultural capital to students. The second half of the chapter explores the structural constraints known to surface in public schools and how they can diminish or hinder counselors' ability to perform their advising duties. It also analyzes the external factors that shape college counseling and students' college aspirations. In chapter three I discuss how data for this study was collected, provide information about participants and research sites, and address my positionality as a researcher. Chapter four discusses the findings of this study, which explores external entities and their influence on college counseling, the different forms of organizational habitus in schools, academic outreach programs and their role in addressing educational inequality, and culturally sensitive counselors who go above their role to support students. Chapters five and six summarize the important take-away points of my research and outlines the theoretical and methodological contributions it makes to the field of sociology. Additionally, it proposes its practical application for informing policy and practice, shortcomings, and future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins by exploring literature on organizational habitus and social and cultural capital frameworks. It then provides an overview of college counseling and advising by discussing student-counselor relationships, structures and obstacles that surface in public high schools, and external factors that shape the availability of college counseling. External factors include district office and state-level forces such as non-profit organizations and federally funded college preparation programs for working-class and minority youth.

#### Multiple Forms of Capital

In theory, schools should be the “great equalizers” that give students the opportunity to reach social mobility despite their socioeconomic and/or racial-ethnic background; however, race and class continues to determine a student’s academic success or failure (Espinoza 2011). For this reason, research has shown that there is an urgency to address the educational inequities among students who do not have access to higher education (Yosso and Solórzano 2006). Even though a similar percentage of students from various racial-ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds share college aspirations (Bryan et al. 2009), students of a higher class enroll in college at higher rates than working-class students (Walpole 2003). According to the Pew Research Center, it is estimated that 50.9 percent of working-class high school graduates will attend a two-year or four-year postsecondary institution in comparison to 80.7 percent of students from a higher socioeconomic background (Desilver 2014). Unequal rates of college enrollment become even greater when working-class students are the first in their families to attend college, which reflects a disparity of transmitted cultural capital.

In his seminal work, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) contends that society,

especially institutions of education, place a value on the customs that advantages individuals of the dominant and higher social class (McDonough 1997). Bourdieu thoroughly describes the concept of social, cultural, and economic capital to explain students' educational success and attainment. He explains that families from a higher socioeconomic background pass along substantially different forms of cultural and social capital to their children in comparison to less privileged ones (1986). The knowledge that parents gift to future generations can help youth understand the diverse types of higher education institutions, the structure of admission processes, and the various degrees offered (McDonough et al. 1997).

Cultural capital is widely used within the field of education because it clearly shows how disparities arise. It has been popularly used to refer to the “systems of attributes, such as language skills, cultural knowledge, and mannerisms, that is derived in part from one’s parents and that defines an individual's class status” (Perna and Titus 2005; 488). Privileged families immerse their children in educational environments such as museums, colleges, theaters, and cinemas, which helps nurture their familiarity with the forms of knowledge that is legitimized for academic success (MacLeod 2009). This may include or exclude particular groups from achieving educational advancement (Nuñez and Bowers 2011). For example, it has been documented that teachers communicate easier with students who participate in elite circles. Teachers give these students more attention and special assistance in comparison to others who may lack the form of cultural capital that is valued in institutions of education (DiMaggio 1982).

Social capital, on the other hand, encompasses the resources, relationships, and networks that families pass along to their children (Bourdieu 1986). Coleman (1988) defined social capital as “a variety of entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors—whether persons or corporate actors—

within the structure” (p. S98). In simpler words, social capital focuses on social networks and connections, and how they are sustained by individuals (Perna and Titus 2005). A more accessible way of explaining Bourdieu’s social and cultural capital theoretical framework can be found in Alejandro Portes’ (1998) scholarship. Portes concisely explained that whereas economic capital is in people’s bank accounts and cultural capital is inside of people’s head; social capital instead exists in the structure of relationships.

Bourdieu (1986) also theorized on the concept of habitus to further explain how students negotiate educational attainment (Nuñez and Bowers 2011). Habitus is a system of dispositions, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about someone’s life opportunities that are transmitted from one generation to the next and influence how the world is constructed around oneself (Bourdieu 1986; McDonough 1997; Horvat and Antonio 1999; Nuñez and Bowers 2011, Espinoza 2011). Even though the concept has been useful in understanding how daily interactions influence individual dispositions, their preferences, and interaction with the social world, it still had not take into consideration how organizations, such as educational institutions, shaped “the social structure and [influenced] individual habitus” (Horvat and Antonio 1999; 319).

To address this gap in research, Patricia McDonough (1997) coined the term *organizational habitus* to theorize about “the impact of a cultural group of social class on an individual's behavior through an intermediate organization” (p. 107). In essence, schools become the transmitters of nonfamilial capital which contributes to a school’s college culture by preparing students academically and making them aware of their various postsecondary college options and school choices (McDonough 1997; Nuñez and Bowers 2011). The process is achieved through school resources devoted to college preparation, institutional support for college advising, and an organizational mission that emphasizes higher education. However,

schools have different organizational habitus based on their social class culture that may impact the college decision-making process. In her study of four California high schools, McDonough found that “organizational habitus made possible individual decisions by bounding the search parameters” [as] “different schools offered different views of the college opportunity structure” (McDonough 1997; 156). Her theoretical contributions expose how organizational habitus can be used to understand the role of schools in reproducing social inequalities. For this explicit reason, Bourdieu’s (1986) social and cultural capital framework and McDonough’s organizational habitus drive the theoretical framework of this study.

### Counselors as Institutional Agents

The College Board National Office for School Counseling Advocacy (NOSCA) states that counseling remains an underresearched topic in the field of education since the existing body of literature gravitates towards the emotional aspect of the counseling field (Bridgeland and Bruce 2011). This literature has been divided into two sub-groups: 1) college counseling and 2) emotional support services such as crisis counseling, student welfare, socio-emotional, and mental health, which tends to be more researched. Because college counseling within the counseling profession is a less well-researched topic, the positive impact that counselors can have on schools and students’ educational success can often-times go under supported and unnoticed (Bridgeland and Bruce 2011). The lack of empirical research on college counseling has impacted counselors experiencing budget cuts due to the little evidence of their influence on student learning and development (McDonough 2005).

Stanton-Salazar (1997) notes that even though educators may function as “gatekeepers” who reproduce educational inequalities, they are also the “life-lines” to resources, opportunities, and support that allows working-class minority youth to succeed academically (González et al.

2003). The students who may not have access to college information at home rely heavily on educators to supplement this college-related knowledge (McDonough 1997; Espinoza 2011; Stanton-Salazar 2011). As a result, these students are more likely to have their college plans influenced by an institutional agent—a college educated adult who provides key forms of social and institutional support (Stanton-Salazar 2011). With the proper institutional support, institutional agents, such as college counselors, have the potential to improve college access for every student because they transmit the cultural capital, educational knowledge, and academic skills that correlate with educational attainment (McDonough 1997).

Scholarship by Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, and Holcomb (2011) supports Stanton-Salazar's research on institutional agents as a social capital resource for working-class families, and outline that:

As students of low-income families progress through their schooling, their parents may become increasingly limited in their own capacities...Academic help, good guidance about school programs, and school counselor assistance with college admissions process can provide the strong networks when students' parents have limited resources.... When referring to college information, adults in the school may provide the only source of social capital for low-income students of color who are first-generation college students (p. 191).

This quote highlights the pivotal role of counselors as they may be the primary point of contact for information and guidance on the college application process. Counselors can provide crucial forms of institutional support that are key ingredients for students' "social integration and success within the school system and in other main institutional spheres" (Stanton-Salazar 1997; 11). Stanton-Salazar outlines that there are seven principal forms of institutionally-based funds of knowledge that are integral for student success: 1) institutionally sanctioned discourses, 2) academic task-specific knowledge, 3) organizational/bureaucratic funds of knowledge, 4) network development, 5) technical funds of knowledge, 6) knowledge of labor and educational

markets, and 7) problem-solving knowledge (Stanton-Salazar 1997; 11-12). These contribute to students' awareness on how to navigate structures, overcome barriers in educational institutions, develop supportive ties with peers and adults, and secure job and educational opportunities.

Nevertheless, early academic interventions with institutional agents have greater impact on student success. Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, and Holcomb's (2011) study on the effects of high school college counseling and college application rates found that, in general, contact with a high school counselor about college-related information was a positive predictor for applying to a postsecondary institution. However, earlier contact with an institutional agent (i.e., 10<sup>th</sup> grade), as opposed to later contact (i.e., after 10<sup>th</sup> grade), undoubtedly increased students' chances of applying to college. This finding speaks to Espinoza's (2011) educational Pivotal Moment framework, which highlights the early academic interventions from college-educated adults who intentionally reach out to students to put them on the route to higher education.

Espinoza's educational Pivotal Moment framework is useful to understand how schools can maximize the academic support that an institutional agent can offer students. Students who have an earlier Pivotal Moment (before or during high school) have a smoother path to higher education in comparison to students who had a later Pivotal Moment (late high school or after). The timing of students' Pivotal Moment can impact their higher education experiences, outcomes, and adjustments. In the context of college counseling and advising, students who have an earlier Pivotal Moment with counselors will be better equipped when they apply to college. Unfortunately, counselors face a plethora of structural constraints that make it difficult for them to regularly meet with students and establish early and intentional academic interventions (McDonough 1997; Espinoza 2011).



## Structural Constraints in College Counseling Departments

In theory, college counselors should serve as a resource for students through performing the job they were trained to do. This includes: to nurture and sustain academic aspirations, provide advice on course selection that will prepare students for rigorous academics, motivate students to achieve, and transmit the educational knowledge that high school students need to investigate and choose a college (McDonough 2005). However, underresourced schools and their location significantly predict whether or not educational inequalities will be reproduced through disparities in college counseling departments (National Association of College Admission Counselors 2004). Research has shown that working-class minority youth who would greatly benefit from college counseling and advising have the least access to it while non-minority youth from a higher socioeconomic background benefit significantly from strong college counseling departments (Lee and Ekstrom 1987; McDonough 2005; Bridgeland and Bruce 2011; Hurley and Coles 2015).

Working-class students in public high schools are 1) less likely to have access to a counselor, 2) the most likely to have underprepared counselors, and 3) the most likely to have counselors pulled away to work on non-counselor tasks (Lee and Ekstrom 1987). Even though the American School Counselor Association has recommended a student-to-counselor ratio of 250:1, data collected during the 2014-15 academic year stated otherwise. For example, Arizona held an outrageously high K-12 public school ratio of 924:1 students per counselor, followed by California with 760:1, and Michigan with 723:1. Only three states (New Hampshire, Vermont, and Wyoming) maintained a ratio lower than 250:1 (NACAC and ASCA 2018). Even though California has yet to meet the recommended student-to-counselor ratio, its average number has improved drastically throughout the years. During the 2010-11 academic year, the average

student-to-counselor ratio in California was 1,016 (American School Counseling Association 2011).

These statistics vary greatly depending on the type of school a student attends. For instance, private high schools have a record of maintaining a low student-to-counselor ratio, which correlates with the total amount of time a counselor spends advising students on a one-on-one basis. This is supported by Barbara Falsey and Barbara Heyns (1984) research on college attendance amongst students who attend private and public schools. Their findings showed that 53.1 percent of private school students with a lower student-to-counselor ratio were encouraged to attend college in comparison to 44.4 percent of students who attended a public school. A recent report conducted by researchers at the Los Angeles Education Research Institute (LAERI) also mirrored these findings (Phillips et al. 2017) Counselors from the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) shared that their large caseload of students limited their ability to work on a one-on-one basis and provide college-related services to their students before senior year. A counselor expressed that if they did not “have such large caseloads, there would be more time to spend with individual students” on college application, financial aid, and enrollment issues (Phillips et al, 2017; 21). The quality and availability of counselors is imperative to address because schools with a well-staffed counseling department report having higher rates of college attendance (McDonough 2005).

In 2009, the annual *Counseling Trends Survey* produced by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) reported that only 22.3 percent of public high schools spent their time on postsecondary admission counseling in comparison to 53.6 percent of private schools. Additionally, other research studies have shown that there is a correlation between students’ socioeconomic background and time available to meet with a counselor. For example,

when less than 25 percent of students were eligible for free and reduced-priced reduced lunch, schools only spent 26 percent of their time on admission counseling. On the contrary, when more than 76 percent of students were eligible for free and reduced-priced reduced lunch, only 20.4 percent of the time was spent on this task (Bridgeland and Bruce 2011).

In addition to a high student-to-counselor ratio, counselors are also assigned to non-counselor roles such as administrative duties, enforcing school discipline, and administering testing. In many public schools, counselors are asked to devote their time to clerical work rather than focusing on college-related responsibilities (McDonough 2005). As a consequence, many students report never visiting their college counselor for advice, guidance, and college-related information (McDonough 2005). The lack of support for working-class and minority students has prompted scholars to argue that schools can be sites of institutional neglect and abuse because there is an inability from school personnel to prepare students to attend a postsecondary institution, particularly a four-year college or university (González et al. 2003).

#### External Factors that Shape College Counseling

The emphasis and value that a school places on the role of the counselor varies greatly depending on the demographics of the students and the district where the school is located (Perna et al. 2008). When studying the role of college counseling in shaping college opportunity, Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson and Li found that external entities such as district offices, state agencies, and local colleges and universities shaped the availability of college counseling in schools (2008). A commitment to postsecondary education was demonstrated through a low student-to-counselor ratio, presence of a designated career and college counselor at schools, and engaging counselors in district-sponsored workshops such as financial aid presentations led by directors at local colleges and universities.

Along with school districts, state-level forces also influenced college counseling at schools. For example, non-profit and federally funded college preparation programs have been institutionalized in schools and their surrounding community as an effort to address educational inequalities and meet the needs of working-class and minority youth (Phillips et al. 2017). College preparation programs are a common approach to increasing the enrollment rates of working-class, racial-ethnic minorities, and first-generation college students in higher education (Perna and Titus 2005). For instance, the federal government has been involved in these efforts since the establishment of TRIO programs in the 1960's. Since then, the federal government has extended its role with the establishment of the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness through Undergraduate Preparation (GEAR UP) in 1998. GEAR UP grantees follow a cohort of middle school students (no later than 7<sup>th</sup> grade) through high school (U.S. Department of Education 2015). Students have access to resources such as college and financial aid advising, SAT preparation, and free trips to colleges and universities.

Other state-level programs that shape college counseling and a school's college-going culture are Upward Bound, the Early Academic Outreach Program (EOP), and the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program (Denner et al. 2005). AVID has been described as an important provider of college counseling at low-and middle-resourced schools. Counselors believe that the AVID program "promotes students' expectations for, knowledge about, and academic preparation for, college through tutoring, supplemental instruction, visits to college campuses, and other activities" (Perna et al. 2008; 152). However, counselors recognize that more resources need to be allocated to reach the whole student body because these grants are not available to every student (Phillips et al. 2017).

When counseling departments do not have the proper institutional support or adequate

resources to advise students on their postsecondary plans, students seek community resources to compensate for the lack of mentorship in their school. For example, after the election of President Donald Trump, thousands of undocumented and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) students feared for their future and educational trajectories. Parents called for the need of having counselors who were familiar with the different components of the immigration status (Romero 2017). Because a handful of counselors remained unfamiliar with the different steps that undocumented students must take to apply and enroll in a postsecondary institution, students sought after the advice and guidance of community outreach programs (Romero 2017).

Zamorano, a coordinator at the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN) College Head Start Program, which supports high school students with their college applications, recalls receiving calls from neighboring schools asking for CARECEN's support because there were not enough counselors who could assist students, particularly those who were undocumented (Romero 2017). Academic and outreach programs such as CARECEN's College Head Start Program are critical in providing extra support and guidance for students and their families as they also build pathways to higher education (Denner et al. 2005). My study builds on these findings to further understand the role that college preparation programs have in schools and their counseling departments.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I discuss the methodology that was undertaken to complete this study. The primary source of analysis consists of fifteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews with counselors in public high schools in Southern California. The interviews conducted focused on five topical areas: a counselor's career, guidance operations, parental involvement, school demographics, and school and district policies. Participation in the study was voluntary. A pseudonym was given to all participants and research sites to protect their anonymity. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded on HyperResearch, a qualitative data management program.

#### Participants and School Sites

After successful approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), fifteen public high school counselors were interviewed during 2017-18. Only counselors who worked in Southern California schools were selected to participate in the study. Participants represent a total of 8 schools districts and 10 public high schools where the average student population ranged from 567 to 3,385 students. Eight out of the fifteen participants worked in schools that had Title 1 funding. According to the U.S Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the purpose of Title 1 is to provide financial assistance to schools that serve a high percentage of disadvantaged children from a low-income family background (1969). Through providing financial assistance, Title 1 hopes to ensure that all children have a fair and equal opportunity to obtaining a high-quality education and reach the state's academic achievement standards (U.S. Department of Education 2004).

In order for a school to qualify for Title 1 funding, at least 40 percent of the student body must qualify for the free and reduced-priced lunch program (U.S. Department of Education 2015). The 2017-2018 annual income eligibility guidelines established that a student in a household of four, at or below the 130 percent of the federal poverty level (approximately \$31,980), is eligible for free meals. If the family income is between the 185 percent of the federal poverty level (\$31,980-\$45,510), then the student qualifies for reduced-priced meals (California Department of Education 2017; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction 2017). During the 2012-2013 academic year, 56.3 percent of public school students in California were eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch (U.S. Department of Education 2014). I intentionally recruited participants who worked in both Title 1 and non-Title 1 schools because scholars have used the free and reduced-price lunch program as a proxy measure for students' socioeconomic status (Schwartz et al. 2011). Participants would be able to discuss the landscape of counseling across schools that served a working-class and/or a middle-upper class student population. Additionally, the concentration of poverty and wealth in schools would provide an analysis that included racial and ethnic minority students. Studies have found that Black and Latino/a youth attend public schools where the majority of students are working-class, while white students attend schools where most of the students are above the poverty line (Saporito and Sohoni 2007).

Overall, three of the fifteen counselors interviewed identified as male and twelve identified as women. Seven of them were White, one was Black, five were Hispanic/Latina/o, and two Asian. Only three of the participants had been working as a counselor for less than 5 years. The rest had been in the counseling profession for quite a while, including 10, 19, and 28 years. Many of the participants had previously worked as elementary, middle, or high school teachers in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Their position as educators exposed them to the

prospect of becoming high school counselors. When I asked why they had decided to join the counseling profession, all of them talked about the possibility of mentoring students, helping them navigate school processes, and creating an impact on their lives. In particular, counselors who shared a working-class and first-generation student background repeatedly talked about being advocates for minority youth and ensuring that they did not fall on the cracks of the educational pipeline.

### Procedure

Participants were recruited via an electronic recruitment email and flyers, counselor events and workshops during the summer, and by word-of-mouth. My job at Pitzer College's Office of Admission allowed me to speak to Admission Counselors who referred me to high schools in the greater Los Angeles County. Once participants expressed an interest in participating in the study, either through email, phone conversations, or in-person conversations, I followed up to schedule a time and place where the participant felt the most comfortable to be interviewed. Most of the interviews took place in the office of counselors, eateries and cafes in the area, and my college campus. The interviews ranged between 45 and 80 minutes. Before each interview began, I read to participants the general introduction of my research study and handed them a consent form to read and sign. Participants had the right to stop the interview at any time.

### Interview Protocol

Interviews conducted focused on five topical areas: the counselor's career, guidance operations, parental involvement, school demographics, and school and district policies. A qualitative interview method allowed counselors to provide depth and detail to the more general picture that quantitative data can offer (Edwards and Holland 2013). This is methodologically significant as many studies on the stratification of college counseling have taken a quantitative



methods approach to explore the issue (see Bryan et al. 2011 and Robinson and Roksa 2016 for reference).

Through the questions asked, I hoped to unearth the landscape of college counseling and advising in Southern California public schools to understand its impact on college counselors' ability to perform their college advising jobs. Some of the questions asked during the interview included, "What has been your experience as a counselor at this school? Can you describe your role a counselor? What expectations does your school have on you as a counselor?" Another point of inquiry focused on how counselors helped students navigate school processes, such as selecting colleges, filling out applications, and applying for financial aid and scholarships. Questions asked were, "When does college advising begin in the school? How do you advice and guide students in making a concrete plan to prepare for college? Are there resources offered from your school and district to create a successful college application process for students? Lastly, I was also interested in understanding whether or not parents and community members influenced college counseling in schools, with questions including, "Does the school try to get parents involved? Are there expectations that parents set on you as a counselor?"

Each interview was fully transcribed and thematically coded on HyperResearch. A code in qualitative inquiry is 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" (Saldaña 2009; 3). For example, some of the codes on HyperResearch included, "Availability to Work with Students," "Transmitting Social/Cultural Capital," "Resources from School and District," "Expectations from Parents," and "Going Above and Beyond Role." Overall, the codes shed light on repetitive patterns and consistencies throughout the data, and the emerging themes that are further discussed in the following chapter.

### Positionality

It is important to highlight my positionality as a researcher to understand how I collected and interpreted data. My background as a student who attended an underresourced public high school in Southern California undoubtedly affected the bias and objectivity in my observations and data analysis. This could have influenced the questions I asked and the perception and assumptions I made about college counseling in each school. Nevertheless, an insider positionality also has methodological advantages that includes a nuanced perspective for observations, building rapport with participants, and having access to more in-group activities (Chavez 2008).

For instance, being a current student at a selective college in the greater Los Angeles area contributed to counselors' willingness to participate in my study. Counselors would often talk about my current undergraduate institution and share that many of their students were also interested in applying. This followed with questions about admission to the college and advice for prospective applicants, particularly those who were also working-class minority youth. After the interview, counselors would often call their students to the counseling office/center so that I could speak with them about applying to a liberal arts college. My interactions with students allowed me to grasp how college advising was structured in schools and gain rich observations that are also analyzed throughout this research study.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with counselors at Southern California public high schools to examine how organizational strategies underlying college counseling departments modify counselors' ability to perform their academic and college advising duties. Data revealed that a district's commitment to college access and opportunity, along with parents' expectations of maintaining a high college-going culture, undoubtedly influenced the value placed on the role of the counselor. (In)adequate institutional support either diminished or exacerbated structural constraints in counseling departments. As a result, schools employed different counseling pedagogies that reflected divergent views of the educational opportunity structure. To address educational inequality in schools, college preparatory programs and culturally sensitive counselors worked to institutionally support working-class minority students and increase college enrollment rates

#### External Entities and their Influence on College Counseling

Mr. Smith<sup>1</sup> is one of six counselors at a middle-upper class high school located in the suburbs of Southern California. Before beginning our interview, he and his counseling team invited me to attend one of their weekly meetings. It was fall semester, and they were scheduling times to visit the entire senior grade during their English class. The first set of college application deadlines were due in two months, so the counselors wanted to review the California State University (CSU) and the University of California (UC) applications. The goal was to keep students in the loop of the FAFSA, CSS Profile, and college due dates, thoroughly review the list

---

<sup>1</sup> A pseudonym has been given to all participants and research sites to protect their anonymity.

of personal insight questions for the UC application, and coach students on how to ask teachers, staff, and/or employers for strong letters of recommendation.

According to Mr. Smith, this had not been the first time students learned about the college application process; in fact, the counseling team had consistently visited students during their English and Physical Education (PE) courses since they were in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. From an early start, students were exposed to a plethora of college-going knowledge in hopes to motivate students to challenge themselves academically, take Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and enroll in their schools International Baccalaureate (IB) program. The counseling team strategically advised students on how to complete the CSU and UC A-G course requirements,<sup>2</sup> lay the path to their high school graduation, and give them the tools to apply and enroll in a four-year postsecondary institution.

As I sat and listened to the conversations taking place, Mr. Smith's colleagues would turn my way and initiate side conversations. They would tell me about how proud they were of their effective counseling pedagogies, students' acceptances to highly selective colleges and universities, and how the capacity of their work was a testament to the commitment the school district and community placed on college counseling. In their eyes, the resources the school allocated towards the counseling department would not be possible without the constant support from the district. Not only did districts provide schools with adequate financial resources, but they also established expectations on counseling departments and crystallized what the role of

---

<sup>2</sup> The CSU and UC systems have established a minimum set of courses that prospective 9th-grade students are required to meet in order to apply for admissions. The A-G requirements include: A) two years of history/social science, B) four years of college preparatory English, C) three years of preparatory math, four years recommended by the UC, D) two years of laboratory science, three years recommended by the UC, E) two years of a language other than English, three years recommended by the UC, F) one year of visual and performing arts, F) one year of college preparatory elective chosen from the "a-f" courses (California Department of Education 2017).

the counselor should entail. While every district expected counselors to increase the percentage of students who were graduating from high school, the commitment towards the counseling profession differed greatly. Some districts worked collaboratively with a school's counseling department while others institutionally neglected them and only came around during budget cuts.

Mr. Smith, who had previously worked at multiple school districts in Southern California public high schools, was able to attest to how districts placed different expectations and values on school counselors. He notes:

In ICSD [school district that serves predominantly underresourced schools], when budget came around, it was like, "Okay, which counselors can we cut?"...Yeah, and a lot didn't know what the counselor did and it was like, use the counselor how you want to use them. Here, they [his current school district] understand the importance of the counselor; they understand the role of the counselor. The counselor is valued and is really, really supported within [the school] and that makes a difference for students.

Counselors were aware that the value placed on college counseling undoubtedly impacted their role in the school. Ms. López, a counselor at a working-class high school, shared that one of the reasons as to why she did not want to become a counselor at ICSD was because of her previous experience in working at that district as an English teacher. There, she had an inside perspective of how counselors were "not being used appropriately." Rather than focusing on college and academic advising, her colleagues spent more time doing clerical work and mirroring the role of a secretary. The lack of intervention from the district upset a handful of participants in my study. Many felt hopeless and defeated by the bureaucracy in their district and often questioned who was going to value the role of the counselor if the powerhouse [school district] did not. To them, school districts, particularly those that served underresourced schools, did a disservice to working-class minority youth who greatly benefited from the role of the counselor.

Mr. Smith continued by explaining that school districts did not act alone in influencing the role of the counselor; in fact, he strongly believed that community members, such as parents and families, influenced the caliber of support that districts placed on schools:

One of our school board members—I've had her kids that have gone through here. They work in the university level where they have been the director of admissions from highly selective schools, so they understand the importance on the role of the counselor. I think the community really values the role of the counselor as well and that's why they're comfortable with picking up the phone and saying, "I'm gonna call the counselor and the counselor is gonna have an answer or support me through this process." I think because the community values the role of the counselor, I think that triples over to the district and trickles over to the school board and district policies for counselors. I think that's one of the reasons why, as a counselor, this is one of the ideal jobs to be.

Parents who had the social and cultural capital valued by institutions of education felt a sense of entitlement to directly voice their concerns and college-related expectations to the district. Through this motive, with direct contact in schools and their district, parents and community members helped establish the organizational strategies that contributed to the nature of college counseling. Mr. Smith's statement of "because the community values the role of the counselor, I think that trickles over to the district," highlights that parents and outside constituencies had an agency that was heard and reciprocated back by school officials. As a result, the expectations placed on college counseling at school districts trickled down to individual schools and their counseling departments.

Ms. Richards, who had been a counselor at a predominantly middle-upper class high school for the past 28 years, also believed that parents and the community influenced the way counseling was structured. She shared that a few years ago a group of parents stormed to the school district because "they were not happy with the fact that [the school] didn't have a higher percentage of students enrolled in four-year colleges and universities." The second reason as to why parents were upset—which Ms. Richards found shocking—was because students had not

been accepted to Stanford University, a prestigious private university in Northern California with less than a four percent acceptance rate. She illustrates:

For a while, Stanford was not accepting students. Stanford was a big thing. They wanted more kids admitted to more selective schools, like the Ivy League, Stanford, MIT, and places like that. They felt that we, as guidance counselors, weren't advocating enough for our students to those colleges. They wanted the college counselor to build relationships with colleges, service, and advocate. I can't speak for the other counselors, but now I call the colleges and advocate on behalf of my students.

As a result of the concerns that parents voiced to the district, counselors were now expected to 1) form close partnerships with the colleges and universities that students were applying to and 2) increase the number of students admitted to Stanford. To be proactive in these efforts, the school opened a new position and hired a counselor whose primary responsibility was to focus on college and career advising. She was the go-to person for specific questions regarding college and financial aid.

The district also allocated a nice budget for counselors to attend multiple professional development conferences and travel to colleges around the U.S. Ms. Anderson, who also worked in the counseling center with Ms. Richards, shared that attending national and regional conferences allowed her to stay up-to-date with the nuances of higher education. This led to her ability to give students current information about the college application process and share what she learned with the counseling team:

I've been able to be to travel quite a bit and go to professional development conferences and be a part of a professional organization. The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and our regional Western Association for College Admission Counseling (WACAC) is something that I heavily started to get involved in. The beauty of those is that we meet colleges around the world. You have counselors throughout California and nationally, and you've got nonprofits and entities like the College Board and the ACT. What I really have been able to do is dive into this window of every discussion that has to do with college counseling and higher education.

Ms. Decker, the college counselor at an upper-class high school, also appreciated her school

district for allowing multiple counselors to take advantage of professional development opportunities. She recalls working in at a previous district that only allowed one counselor to attend conferences. However, her current school and district “really support and promote professional development.” Ms. Decker believes “that’s such a necessary part of doing [her] job effectively.” Parents were in favor of counselors attending national and regional conferences because it allowed them to network and build partnerships with important individuals in the world of college admissions. To them, it was an investment that would pay off and reflect in students’ postsecondary achievements—the more informed a counselor was, the better the chances for a student to gain admissions at a prestigious university.

Participants also talked about the level of participation that district officials had in schools. In certain cases, the district supervisor was also the Assistant Principal who was assigned to oversee the counseling department. This facilitated easier contact and communication between counselors and district officials, and allowed both parties to voice their concerns and suggestions on how to improve academic counseling and advising. Ms. Fong notes:

We all have a chain of command. Here, we have our team, and on this site, our supervisor is the Assistant Principal who's been assigned to counseling and she's great. She joins our meetings every Wednesday because she wants to know what's going on and be there for us, answer questions, and provide pieces from her end for us to be aware of. Beyond her, our main supervisor, or actual formal supervisor, and she’s located at the district office. From the person up there, she's our support system where we consult with her, where we connect with her on issues, or even need her to be aware of, or seek her help in any way. In fact, Naviance was actually brought to our district through the vetting of the office that saw it as a program that might be of value to our students, and that's how it came about... Naviance is a huge resource that many schools actually don't have.

Naviance is a comprehensive K-12 college and career readiness online database that helps districts and schools align student strengths and postsecondary goals. Students and parents have access to the resources that Naviance has to offer, which include college and career preparation, career exploration, academic planning, and self-discovery. Counselors consider Naviance as a



huge resource that district can provide to schools because it helps the counseling department meet their college-related goals. For example, counselors in the Minneapolis public school district credit Naviance for the 6 percent increase of students attending a four-year college (Herbert 2012).

Counselors acknowledged that they were fortunate to have Naviance in their school and that the district could afford to pay thousands of dollars for the online program. In fact, participants who worked at schools that did not qualify for Title 1 funding currently had Naviance or recall it being present at some point in time. However, only one counselor at a school with T1 funding shared that students and families had access to Naviance. Ms. Fernandez, the counselor at this school, expressed excitement to use Naviance because she was “looking forward to having the tool really enhance [her] counseling skills.” A resource such as Naviance attests to the unequal distribution of resources across schools and their district as it managed to create a digital divide between students and online resources about career and college opportunities. Even though running a counseling department without Naviance was still manageable, counselors believed it would be immensely helpful to further support students and their postsecondary goals.

#### Different Schools, Different Organizational Habitus

Schools have different organizational habitus that influences how academic advising and the college choice decision-making process occurs. External entities such as the ones I outlined above modify counselors’ ability to perform their college-advising duties. Following McDonough’s (1997) organizational habitus, this section explores how counseling departments offer different views of the educational opportunity structure based on their school’s organizational strategies (actions and benchmarks that a school sets to ensure that long-term

goals are achieved).

Despite a school's location, racial-ethnic and socioeconomic diversity, student population, and resources allocated to the counseling department, all of my participants shared one thing in common; as part as their counseling roles, they were expected to cover three main domains: academic, socio-emotional, and college and career advising. Nevertheless, findings showed that counseling departments in some schools could to prioritize one domain over the other, while counselors at other schools had to wear several administrative hats on a daily basis.

Participants shared that the college-going culture in their school set the tone for which domain counselors should prioritize with the student body. In many instances, counselors felt the need to focus more on the academic and college/career advising aspect of their job because students expected to receive that type of guidance as soon as they were in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Ms. Fong explains:

It's a very, very intense college-going atmosphere, so with that comes the expectation that we are very supportive with our students, work with them closely, and helping them reach their postsecondary goals as well. Like I said, in the school, there is a very high college-going rate and also an environment that fosters that. A lot of kids intend to go to a four-year college. They want to and plan that not even in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, but from 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> as they're preparing to come here. Many of them come to school in 9<sup>th</sup> grade expecting to go to a four-year college and for us to help them.

The college-going culture in schools undoubtedly influenced how counselors helped students achieve their academic and college-related goals. In many instances, this began with strategically counseling students from the “get-go,” as Ms. Hutchins highlights:

I have to start right from the get-go. In their freshman year we are already whispering in their ear, "these are your opportunities." We start from the get-go. You come into the guidance department and we're all about college. We do have four-year plans. They get to map that out their freshman year. From the get-go they can see the trajectory of the four years and they can start making decisions as early as their freshman year as to what they would like to do in the long run. Right out of the gate there, it's really intentional. We're giving them information. Kudos points for this department. Yes, the information is always ongoing—from their freshman year and all year long, it's always there.

Meeting with students as early as possible allowed counselors to transmit critical information on course selection for maximal academic preparation and give advice on how to investigate and choose a college. Ms. Stein, who had been a counselor for the past 20 years, shared that her counseling department began those conversations with students even before they were in high school: “we start those conversations in eighth grade with students when we go over to their middle school.” Before the start of every academic year, she and her colleagues visited the local middle schools to give presentations about their high school graduation requirements, the CSU and UC A-G requirements, and to create strategic five-year plans that considered student’ post-graduation goals. From the get-go, students were told that they had what it took to succeed and pursue higher education.

Ms. Richards shared that her counseling team followed a similar approach with students. She explained that she and her colleagues went to the local middle school to give an overview of their program and give students a tentative course schedule for 9th grade. Their goal was to start “introducing [students] to the vocabulary” they would hear throughout high school. Additionally, these meetings gave students the opportunity to meet with the counselor who would work with them throughout high school. Based on alphabetical order, students were assigned to one of the six counselors in the department, who advised them from 9<sup>th</sup> through 12th-grade. Because Ms. Richard’s team had a total of six counselors, each counselor had a caseload of 250 students, successfully meeting the recommended student-to-counselor ratio proposed by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA).

Having a well-staffed and resourced counseling team allowed counselors to prioritize academic and college/career advising, and, consequently, develop strategic counseling pedagogies that were put into place early on students’ educational trajectories. Unfortunately, not

every school had the capacity to intentionally build relationships with students from the moment they stepped foot on campus. Because of their outrageously high student-to-counselor ratios, counselors had to make sacrifices and prioritize the 12<sup>th</sup> and 11th-grade class versus their younger students. Mr. Wong shares:

I wish we had more time where I could spend and meet with every single one of my students, all 480. Would it be nice to have a reduction in caseload? Absolutely. Would it be nice to have an additional counselor to reduce our caseload? Absolutely. That would free me up to spend more time with my freshmen, with my sophomores, and get to know my freshmen starting their freshman year. I've heard of counselors with a very low caseload and they have a lot of time to spend with each kid. But here, as a public high school counselor, I mean, 480 students? I'll be lucky to know a quarter of my students, right? Where it seems like I know most of my seniors, then my juniors, my freshman, I don't even know who they are, sadly. That's one of the things that's a challenge for us as counselors...Right now we're identifying the ninth graders that are credit deficient. We have some ninth graders who are off to a very bad start fulfilling a couple classes. We're going to make sure that we identify them, get them back on track, put them into classes that they need for the next couple years. Reaching the ninth graders is the key because otherwise they either go off the wrong path and don't graduate, which is not what we want...I wish we had more time, Adriana, where we can meet one-on-one with every single one of our students. I can honestly speak for myself and others, it will be a nice luxury to have if we can sit down and spend quality time with each and every one of our freshmen who we don't know...I don't even know who my freshman are. I just see the transcript and I see the names. Have I met them in person one on one in my office? No. Would I like to? Absolutely, because I've got about a 125 freshmen but there's not enough time to call them, 125 one by one to meet with them.

As Mr. Wong explained, meeting with every student on his caseload was a “luxury.” Counselors who worked with predominantly first-generation and working-class minority students acknowledged that their advisees did not receive the guidance or information that would get them a head-start in developing the behaviors that would enhance their academic success and put them on the path to a four-year college. This frustrated and saddened counselors and made them feel like the structural constraints in their school hindered their role as institutional agents and transmitters of social and cultural capital. Even though counselors wanted to do more for their students, their hands were tied and as a result students learned about their college opportunities

later on in their high school trajectory.

A high student-to-counselor ratio was not the only hurdle that counselors encountered on a daily basis. While counselors were also expected to focus on students' social-emotional welfare, schools hired additional staff to fulfill that role. This allowed counselors to focus their time and energy on advising and college/career responsibilities because the social-emotional advising did not take up a lot of their time. It was a collaborative effort with other staff rather than a full responsibility. Ms. Richards explains:

The academic and college part are a bigger part of our job. The social-emotional...because in addition to having an intervention counselor, we have more than 10 interns who are doing their internship through a counseling center to get their state licenses. The MFT's and the MSW's, they all need about 3,000 hours of field work. We are one of the places where they do their fieldwork. Basically we get them at no cost, or at a small cost that we pay [the center] because they have to be supervised by someone from [the center]. We have a lot of them that are here and they provide personal counseling throughout the day.

Not every school had the resources or capacity to designate social-emotional counseling to one specific person. Ms. Olviedo, a counselor at an underresourced school, points that she and her two colleagues wore the hat of an academic counselor, a college counselor, a guidance counselor, and an emotional counselor as they are expected to address every issue that came their way. As a result, counselors found themselves spending more time on non-academic and college/career advising.

Mr. Smith also shared that schools, specifically those with a high percentage of racial-ethnic minorities, also included discipline and supervision to the social-emotional responsibility that counselors were expected to address. In his previous counseling job at a school district that is notoriously known for policing and hypercriminalizing Black and Latino youth, Mr. Smith recalls spending a lot of his time dealing with discipline and school suspensions. He estimated that 60 to 70 percent of his time was spent enforcing discipline rather than fostering close

relationships with students. Similarly, Ms. Stein recalled that at some point in her career she was expected to be in charge of school discipline “up to the point where [she was] running SAR (School Attendance Review meetings)...and could even do on-site suspensions.” In these instances, the line between a school counselor and a police officer were blurred. In the eyes of youth, counselors were not there to academically support students and put them on the path to higher education; but rather to police and be gatekeepers in their educational and career aspirations.

It is evident that counselors at underresourced schools were assigned to non-counselor tasks that detracted them from focusing their time and energy on counselor-related duties. Data showed that the volume of non-counselor tasks assigned to counselors had a positive correlation to the total number of counselors in the department and the level of collaboration amongst them. The more support and collaboration between colleagues, the less work individual counselors had to complete, and the more time they could allocate towards advising students. Nonetheless, not every counselor was this fortunate.

Ms. Buceta was the college counselor at Southern California High School (SCHS), a school where over 97 percent of the student body qualified for free and reduced lunch. Even though her school had three other counselors whose role was also to address academic, social-emotional, and college counseling, SCHS placed all of the academic and college related responsibilities on Ms. Buceta. As a result, Ms. Buceta advised over 1,000 students who relied on her to maneuver the intricacies of the educational pipeline. This caused her a lot of stress and anger because nobody in the school, including the other counselors, wanted to share the academic and college advising responsibility. As a result, Ms. Buceta was constantly overworked and spent a lot of her time completing tasks that others should be doing. She shared:

One of the things I'm feeling nowadays is that I'm doing more and more paperwork than in the past. If I have to do paperwork, then that means that I don't have time to meet with students. Apart from being the *only* person responsible for helping students go to college or to do whatever they want to do after they finish high school when they graduate, I am also the PSAT coordinator. I am responsible for the AP tests, I am responsible for the SAT and ACT's, give [students] the fee waivers....I am also the advisor for the National Honors Society. I do the senior awards ceremony at the end of the year, I am part of the graduation by doing the decorations, I don't know, what else do I do?...I don't have no help, what's so ever. I don't have a clerk or anyone who can come a couple of hours to do paperwork. When I do the fieldtrips I have to do all the paperwork for the bus, for getting the students cleared by the nurse because that's a new thing from [the district]...Even if they say they recognize your job, blah, blah, in the daily basis I am the only person here, I am the only one who is responsible for meeting the deadlines. Sometimes, it's a little bit frustrating.

Every fall semester, Ms. Buceta began the academic year disillusioned, knowing that the role of the counselor was not prioritized. The school Principal even created a "policy" that restricted her from visiting students during their class time. Even though she went above and beyond for students, the various obstacles and barriers put in her way hindered her ability to perform her college-advising duties. If her school equally distributed the academic and college counseling responsibility amongst her other colleagues, advising in the school would be more robust. This highlights the importance of having counseling departments that works collectively with one another.

Schools can either create a path towards social mobility or do the complete opposite by reproducing educational inequities. This is particularly concerning because students who cannot rely on their families for guidance on how to maneuver the educational structure rely heavily on college educated adults as a supplemental source of information. High school counselors have the potential to transmit the academic knowledge that correlates with students' educational success; however, organizational structures in schools can either facilitate or hinder them from perform their college-related duties. Emerging theme in this section showed that the organizational habitus in schools, influenced by social class structure and a college-going

culture, created different educational opportunities for students. While some counselors had the privilege of establishing early and intentional academic interventions with their students, others did not meet their advisor until the end of their high school career. A commitment to higher education and college was thus reflected through the support counselors had in schools and their availability to expose the whole student body to their academic and postsecondary options.

#### Addressing Educational Inequities through College Preparatory Programs

On January 2018, while attending a community outreach event for first-generation college goers in the greater Los Angeles area, I met Amanda, a high school senior who was currently attending the school where Ms. Buceta worked as a counselor. While speaking with Amanda I learned that Ms. Buceta, who I had interviewed a year ago, was no longer working at Southern California High School (SCHS). More shockingly, Amanda shared that SCHS had not hired a new college counselor. Startled, I immediately contacted Ms. Buceta and learned that approximately six months ago she had been laid off and was now working at another public school in the district. If Amanda's school no longer had a college counselor, then who was guiding students towards the necessary steps to be on track to their high school graduation and meet the required A-G courses to apply and attend a four-year institution? I was curious to find out how academic and college advising was manifested now that Ms. Buceta was gone and there was no college counselor at SCHS.

After making calls and contacting people at the school, I was directed to the staff at the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program (GEAR UP). GEAR UP is a federal program funded by the U.S. Department of Education designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Schools with a GEAR UP grant have staff housed on their campus to work alongside students



and counselors to create a college-going culture. Mr. Turner, a GEAR UP counselor at SCHS, explained that SCHS had had the grant for the past five years, beginning with the graduating class of 2017 and 18 when students were in their seventh grade at the various middle schools that fed into high schools in the area.

Their role as GEAR UP counselors was designed to be an extra resource to the SCHS Class of 2017 and 2018 by providing students with academic and college advising, SAT and ACT prep courses, and field trips to colleges and universities in the U.S. Unfortunately, only current seniors (Class of 2018) had access to the plethora of resources that GEAR UP had to offer. This meant that the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup>-grade students at SCHS were not eligible for their counseling resources. Nonetheless, because the school no longer had a college counselor, the GEAR UP staff felt a responsibility to help other students as well. Ms. Fuentes, a counselor at SCHS GEAR UP, shared:

The school, because they don't have a college counselor, the kids are coming in here. Right now we're pretty much the college office until their counselor gets going. For our program, it's more like we're here to support. We're not supposed to supplant, but we're here to support. Really, I mean, there's no college counselor so there's a lot of supplanting going on. It is what it is. The kids need the information and it has to get done.

Federally funded programs can create a positive impact on students' lives. While they are designed to provide additional support in schools, they often have to take the role of "supplanting resources" because schools lack the institutional support to guide and advice students. This finding is particularly significant because it sheds light on the important role that federally funded programs play, especially during times when they are the only point of contact for information about college and financial aid. Nevertheless, it also points to the fact that to successfully help a counseling department create a college-going culture, the school and district should be committed to supporting the role of the counselor. If external programs and counselors

collaborated with one another, rather than supplanted academic and college advising, their impact on schools and students would be more robust.

An example of how counselors and external programs collaborated with another to support students was highlighted while speaking with Ms. López, who shared that her school had recently been assigned a group of college advisors and interns from a Corps Program directed by a prestigious university in the surrounding area. The goal of the program was to create partnerships with districts and schools to help increase the number of students who would attend and complete college. Rather than supplanting academic and college counseling at their schools, the program was an extra resource to students, families, and counseling departments. Ms. López notes that having the help of two college advisors helped the counseling team tremendously. This allowed her to host more workshops and events, and help seniors apply to college and financial aid:

For the college advisors, I work closely with them because my project this year was first-generation students. Every Tuesday during lunch we are at the computer lab of the college and career center. Last semester it was a lot of college applications. They'll come in, we'll check in right away, or, you know, "let me help you work on your personal insight questions" and this semester it's FAFSA. I have a list of kids that have not submitted or are in the process. We are strategically trying to call them during their time to make sure that they fulfill what they need to do to get to college.

With the extra support of college advisors, Ms. López was able to meet with more students on her caseload. In many cases, college advisors were also assigned to a small group of students who they would meet with throughout the academic year. Most college advisors were assigned to work with 9th-grade students who received the least support in the school. Though they did not advise every student, counselors were content that their advisees had access to someone whose main priority was to invest their time and energy on them. While middle-upper class students could afford outside private counselors who guided them through the college application process,

working-class and minority youth instead benefited from external college preparatory programs and college advisors who were vital in helping transmit the tools and educational knowledge that correlates with students' educational success. Together, they helped combat and address educational inequalities in underresourced schools.

### A Labor of Love

When advising youth, not every counselor had a keen awareness of who were the students that benefited the most from the role of a counselor. Some counselors shared that their counseling pedagogies and advising styles remained the same regardless if a student had educated parents or were going to be the first in their families to attend college. Their pedagogies reflected an “equality vs. equity” counseling style where they believed everyone would be on an equal playing field if students received the same kind of mentorship. When I asked Ms. Fong if her counseling strategies changed depending on the students who she worked with, she highlighted:

They remain the same with every student, regardless of socioeconomic status, where their parents are from, or if they are second or third generation, we still provide the same level of guidance and level of attention. It only varies when [students] seek us out for more help.

Counselors who followed this counseling approach were not proactive in reaching out to students who needed extra support and guidance. They dismissed the reality that once the bell rang and students went back home, not everyone had the opportunity to consult with their parents about college deadlines, AP, IB, and Honor courses, or standardized tests like the ACT and SAT.

On the contrary, educators who were aware of the academic and educational barriers that working-class minority youth and first-generation college students faced in their education actively went above and beyond their roles to provide the extra support students needed. Ms. Stein recalls coming across twin sisters who were not going to apply to college because they

thought they would not be able to afford a four-year university. Aware that these students were first-generation college goers, she made sure to meet with them individually and provide the extra assistance that they needed:

I had a situation with a couple of students last year, or a couple years ago, they were twins. These students were first generation; their parents didn't have more than an eighth-grade education. They told me that they couldn't afford to go to a four-year college. They were pretty good students. These were students that qualified for free-reduced lunch. So these two students, in particular, I met with multiple times during their junior and senior year and gave them a lot of extra assistance because I knew they needed it. They came to a lot of the workshops that we had. They said, "our parent is not able to help us with this at home." Their parent was the one that told them that they couldn't afford to go to college and that they were going to have to go to a community college because that's all they could afford. Having conversations with that parent and having conversations with the students...they were able to go to a four-year college. They both did. Because of their financial situation, they practically got a full-ride.

Meeting with students and their families allowed counselors to dispel myths about higher education and the college application process. Rather than placing a deficit model towards minority youths' families and their communities, counselors knew that not every student had access to the same resources at home, as noted by Mr. Turner: "You find that in the First-Gen population... because at home, you don't have mom saying, 'Hey, did you get an email from the Cal States yet? What are they doing with that?'" We have parents who don't know anything about this process. They are just not informed, so that's why we try to do a lot of work with parents."

Mr. Turner saw the transformative power that counselors could make on the lives and educational trajectories of students. In his eyes, the kind of work he did with students was more of college access than college counseling. He believed that from the moment his students walked on the stage on their high school graduation they were not only going to receive a piece of paper, but they were also going to create a generational shift in their family:

Our work is college access more than even college counseling. We can sometimes fall under the umbrella of college access counselors because it's a generational change. All of our students are first-Gen, all of our students are Title 1, free lunch. Through working

with the parents, continuously encouraging them, informing them about higher education. I think the biggest service that college can provide a student from this area is giving them a career versus a job. A majority of the parents have jobs and not something that can move up. It's a cycle that repeats itself if you stay in a job. What a college degree can give somebody is the training and expertise to put them in a field where they can grow. That's what I tell the kids all the time. They say, "Mr, *yo no sé si quiero asistir el colegio* [I don't know if I want to go to college]" and I say, "Where do you work right now? How much further can you move up in Little Caesars Pizza with a diploma?" In another field, with some training, you have mobility to move up. That economic mobility turns into social mobility. I tell them, "Come let us know when you get into schools. Even though you don't think it's a big deal, you got to understand that as a First-Gen student, you are actively changing your bloodline. Every single person after you will have a dad or *abuelo* [grandfather] to talk about their experience and to make college a thing. Now you don't need some counselor at the school poking you and saying, "Hey, this is something that you're going to thank me later even if I'm bugging you now." It's a total generational shift.

The satisfaction of knowing that his students would be in a better position than before fueled and inspired Mr. Turner's commitment to go above and beyond his role as an educator. He was transforming lives one step at a time.

The commitment counselors had with underserved student populations intensified when they could relate to the First-Gen experience or were once working-class students. When I asked my participants to talk about their educational trajectories before becoming a counselor, many shared that their own educational experiences informed the pedagogical approaches they had with students. They were pursuing the counseling profession because they wanted to ensure that someone was paving the way for students, just as someone once did with them. Ms. Fernandez illuminated,

I wanted to become a counselor... I received a lot of support growing up and attended college access programs that paved a way for me. I felt like I wanted to pay it forward. I'm really grateful for those individuals. At my campus in UCLA, I received a lot of supporter as well. Being a first-generation Latina and coming from a low-income disenfranchised community, I didn't have family members that knew or attended a four-year university.

Paying it forward became an end goal. Even though counselors worked at underresourced high

schools where a school's organizational structure made their roles challenging to fulfill, they remained determined to plant seeds and help students think differently about themselves and their academic potential. Either counselors let the system break them, or they broke the system themselves. In many instances, this required counselors to maneuver around the obstacles in their counseling departments and ensure that educational inequalities were not exacerbated and reproduced. This occurred in two different ways: institutionalizing programming for working-class minority youth and accessing outside resources to learn how to better support students.

Ms. López is a counselor who is respected by others for being an advocate for the first-generation college goers in her school, particularly those who are “the middle of the road kids” and not seen as “academically promising” because of their GPAs. Targeting this student population is critical because if students are not advised from an early start, then they may fall on the cracks of the educational pipeline. Furthermore, counselors may spend more time advising their high-achieving students with higher GPAs, enrolled in Honors, AP, and the IB program. To address this issue, two years ago, Ms. López and her colleagues institutionalized a program called *Esperanza* [Hope]. The program recruits incoming 9th-grade students whose GPAs are between a 1.5 and 3.0, and would also be the first in their families to pursue a college education. As the school counselor, Ms. López took on the first cohort of students, which had a total of 24 incoming 9th-grade students. She would follow them until they graduated from high school.

Beginning in their 9th-grade, *Esperanza* students were expected to take additional courses on top of their regular caseload. These courses were meant to ease students' transition to high school, expose them to their full academic potential, and learn about issues surrounding race, class, and gender. Mr. López explained,

We usually ask them to come in during the summer to take a class. Last year we asked them to come take World History, which has its pros and cons. This year we're gonna ask

them to do P.E. so they can get credit for that and it will open up a space. For 9th graders we're thinking of a zero period, which I know for ninth graders it's like, "Hey, come at 6 o'clock." The program is definitely worth it. The first year, the ninth grade year, it's a lot about finding their identity, and, again, helping them with their transition to high school. When I go to college fairs I get all the representatives cards and I email them, "Please come to the *Esperanza* classes." They'll come to the career center but I make sure that they go to the *Esperanza* classroom. These kids have heard of really weird off the map colleges because they need that exposure. In ninth grade they start working on presentation skills. They talk about microaggressions and different topics, but it's really a lot about identity. In 10th grade it's more about study skills and about how they're interacting with their community and encouraging them to take advantage of programs. [Our school] has many clubs, so taking advantage of being in a club, participating in sports, the [Latino Student Union].

Through institutionalizing a program like *Esperanza*, Ms. López was able to actively work with the First-Gen population and create larger programming for the whole student body. Additionally, students received extra support through the required classes they were expected to take and had the opportunity to learn about college and financial aid through attending presentations given by Admission Officers from universities around the U.S. By the end of their high school career, students were exposed to a culturally relevant counseling praxis that exposed them to a college-going culture.

Ms. Fernandez was also an educator who went above and beyond her role to ensure that students received the advising they deserved. She was very entrepreneurial and took advantage of summer fellowship programs and grants to maximize the capacity of her counseling department. I met Ms. Fernandez this past summer (2017) at a local university when I was asked to give a presentation about the role that college access programs had in the educational trajectory of students. Ms. Fernandez was part of a group of educators participating in a College Access Summer Institute Program. She shared that as a younger counselor in the profession, she sometimes felt "on the sidelines" and "would have wanted more support," so she took the initiative and proposed to herself to do the Summer Institute Program. As a participant, she

hoped to learn techniques on how to better support students and their families to and through college.

Creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for parents and the community was particularly crucial for Ms. Fernandez because parental engagement in her school was composed of approximately 15-20 family members who regularly came to campus during events. She recognized that family members were not always present during school events because there were existing language barrier between staff and parents and the time when events were hosted did not always align with their schedules. Determined to integrate parents and families in the school environment in accessible ways, Ms. Fernandez decided to focus her College Access Summer Institute Program internship on parent-counselor relationships. During that academic year she was going to host a “series of four parent engagement events and cover information on college access.” She credits the College Access Summer Institute Program for giving her the tools and knowledge that she needed to better support her students and integrate parents into the school.

Educators who cared and had a keen awareness of the barriers that working-class minority youth encountered in their educational trajectories understood the difference between “equality and equity” in college counseling. Through a labor of love, they went above and beyond their roles to intentionally navigate the intricacies and institutional structures in their counseling departments and ensure that students were supported in every possible way. They accomplished this through intentionally mentoring students, institutionalizing programming for first-generation and working-class students, and seeking outside resources to gain the tools, knowledge, and professional development to support students and their families. Their labor of love compensated for the resources that their district could not always provide.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This research study offers a nuanced perspective of how college counseling and advising is organized and structured in Southern California public high schools. In particular, it unearths how organizational strategies (actions and benchmarks that a school sets to ensure that long-term goals are achieved) underlying college counseling departments can modify college counselors' ability to perform their academic and college-advising duties. Data collected from 15 in-depth interviews with counselors revealed that the value and emphasis placed on the counseling profession differed significantly between districts and schools. Overall, this had the power to diminish or exacerbate the structural constraints known to surface in public schools. Counselors expressed that the less institutional support they received from their district and school, the more obstacles they faced on a day-to-day basis. This finding is consistent with Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, and Li (2008) who find that external entities, such as district offices, shape the availability of college counseling in schools. Their study found that a commitment to postsecondary education was reflected through efficiently using the role of the counselor, maintaining a low student-to-counselor ratio, and providing resources that allowed counselors to perform their academic and college advising duties.

Counselors also saw parental involvement as a tool that positively influenced the support and value placed on a college-going culture. Parental involvement has been conceptualized as a form of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) that provides parents with the social control to advocate for their children's academic success and performance (Turney and Kao 2010). While there is a common parental desire for students' educational success, parents from some racial and ethnic groups may not feel comfortable communicating with teachers or participating

in school activities because of existing language barriers or cultural differences (Yan and Lin 2005). For example, in contrast to those who are white, immigrant parents perceive greater barriers to getting involved in their children's school (Turney and Kao 2010). Yosso (2005) highlights that schools need to move away from placing a deficit view towards working-class and communities of color because families are not at fault for the existing barriers in their parental involvement (Yosso 2005).

Through using a deficit-based model, the capital of those with higher education and socioeconomic class is valued more by dominant institutions. As a result, these parents form clear conceptions of their role in schools and believe that education is a shared responsibility where both constituencies are accountable for promoting students' academic success (Lareau 1987). My research findings showed that parents had the entitlement to directly voice their concerns and college-related expectations to the district, where their demands were heard and reciprocated. This was seen through a district providing adequate resources that allowed counselors to perform their college advising duties and establish an organizational mission that emphasized higher education.

Mirroring McDonough's organizational habitus theoretical framework (1997), schools and their district offered significantly different views of the educational opportunity structure. This influenced how advising and the college choice process occurred. Counselors credit their large caseload of students as limiting their ability to work with students on a one-on-one basis and transmit the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) that correlates with educational attainment and success. While some counselors began the advising process when students were in the 8th or 9th-grade, others did not have the capacity to meet with younger students. As a result, students learned about their academic and college opportunities towards the end of their

high school trajectory. This may have negatively impacted a student's chance of applying to college as research has shown that earlier contact with a school counselor (10<sup>th</sup> grade), as opposed to later interventions, has more significant positive academic outcomes (Bryan et al. 2011; Espinoza 2011). In addition to high student-to-counselor ratios, counselors were also assigned to non-counselor tasks such as administrative duties and administering testing. It was also common for counselors to spend the majority of time enforcing school discipline and be in charge of school suspensions. This often blurred the lines between a school counselor and a police officer as it was difficult for students to gauge whether or not their counselor wanted to see them succeed academically or place barriers in their educational trajectory.

Underresourced schools were also a significant predictor of disparities and structural constraints in college counseling departments. While students in highly-resourced public schools benefited from strong college counseling departments, students in underresourced schools did not always have access to a counselor. Structural constraints had the power to hinder counselors from doing the job they know best, which includes to nurture and sustain academic aspirations, provide guidance on course selection, and advice students on how to investigate and choose a college (McDonough 2005). As a result, federally funded college preparation programs were institutionalized in schools to address educational inequalities and meet the needs of working-class and minority youth. Through working with counselors and staff, college access programs were a common approach to increasing the college enrollment rates of underrepresented student populations (Perna and Titus 2005). College preparation program either supplanted academic and college advising or worked in collaboration with the counseling department. Supplanting college counseling commonly occurred when schools did not have a counselor on campus. On the other hand, through acting as an extra resource in the counseling department, both college preparation

programs and counselors worked collaboratively to create a college-going culture and expose students to their postsecondary options.

Culturally sensitive counselors also worked to remedy educational inequities and increase college enrollment rates. They achieved this by going above and beyond their role to further support students who could not rely on their family as a supplemental source of information about college. These student-counselor relationships mirrored an “authentic caring” approach that allowed counselors to develop trusting relationships with students and positively alter their academic experience and educational trajectories (Valenzuela 1999). This finding highlights the narrative of counselors who proactively maneuver and navigate institutional barriers to assure they are the “life-lines” to resources, opportunities, and support that allows working-class minority youth to succeed academically (González et al. 2003).

Collecting qualitative data on college counseling in public high schools offers a nuanced perspective of how academic and college advising is structured in schools and how it reflects divergent views of the educational opportunity structure. I believe my research is methodologically and theoretically significant as past studies have taken a quantitative approach to study the stratification of college counseling. A qualitative approach instead allows counselors to provide depth and detail to a more general picture. Additionally, interviewing counselors in California, the state with the second highest public school student-to-counselor ratio, exposes the structural constraints that counselors face on a day-by-day basis. It also sheds light on the effect that stratification of college counseling has on the educational trajectory of students from Southern California public high schools, a region that serves a highly diverse student population.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

*It's a generational change. All of our students are First-Gen, all of our students are Title I, free lunch....I tell them, "Come let us know when you get into schools. Even though you don't think it's a big deal, you got to understand that as a First-Gen student, you are actively changing your bloodline. Every single person after you will have a dad or abuelo [grandfather] to talk about their experience and to make college a thing. Now you don't need some counselor at the school poking you and saying, "Hey, this is something that you're going to thank me later even if I'm bugging you now." It's a total generational shift.*

*-Mr. Turner, Counselor*

Mr. Turner has a keen awareness of the social and academic challenges that working-class minority youth and first-generation college goers encounter in their educational trajectory. He understands that his students come from families where there may be a lack of information on the critical steps needed to apply and enroll in a two-year or four-year postsecondary institution. For that reason, Mr. Turner is committed to exposing his students to the key forms of educational knowledge and academic skills that correlate with educational success. To him, guiding youth towards higher education creates a “generational change” because students will change the “bloodline” of their family. Future generations will not have to rely on a high school counselor for advice and guidance; instead, students will have the privilege to turn to their family for college-related information.

Mr. Turner’s statement illuminates the pivotal role that high school counselors can have in the educational pursuit of students as they have the potential to improve college access. However, as this thesis argued, schools have different organizational structures that modify counselors’ ability to perform their academic and college advising duties. Findings showed that districts and schools placed a different value on the role of the counselor, which undoubtedly influenced a school’s organizational habitus and type of guidance that counselors could execute

and accomplish. As a result, counselors had different counseling pedagogies that reflected divergent views of the educational opportunity structure. While some students benefited from strategic counseling pedagogies that began as early as the 9th-grade, others did not meet with their counselor until they were upperclassmen. Early academic interventions with students were often seen as “luxury” because counselors had too many students on their caseload, so they prioritized older (11th and 12th grade) students. This highlights how access to different forms of institutional support and resources can either diminish or exacerbate the structural constraints embedded in public high schools.

To address the reproduction of educational inequities, federally funded college preparation programs and culturally sensitive counselors worked to remedy educational disparities and increase the college enrollment rates of working-class minority students. College preparation programs were institutionalized in schools to assist counselors in meeting the needs of working-class and minority youth. They either worked in collaboration with the counseling department or supplanted academic and college advising when schools did not have a college counselor. College preparation programs helped counselors reach a larger student population and host events intended to transmit critical information on course selection and give advice on how to research and apply to college. Furthermore, culturally sensitive counselors with a keen awareness of the barriers that working-class minority youth encountered in their educational trajectory also worked to dismantle educational inequities. Counselors went above and beyond their role as educators through navigating institutional structures. They created programming for first-generation college students and sought outside resources to maximize the capacity of their counseling departments. They took matters into their own hands to ensure they were able to perform their college advising duties.

I believe this study can inform policy and practice in educational institutions. It highlights the pivotal role that counselors can have in shaping students' academic and postsecondary aspirations if counselors are institutionally supported and valued by the district and school. Through exposing institutional neglect and stratification of college counseling, educational practitioners and policymakers can use my research findings to ensure that schools have the adequate amount of resources to support high school counseling departments. Furthermore, it calls for the need to hire more prepared counselors and decrease the outrageously high student-to-counselor ratios. Lastly, this study also points to the importance of having federally funded college preparation programs in schools that serve predominantly working-class minority students.

#### Shortcomings and Future Research

A shortcoming of this study is its limited scope. Sociologists and education researchers can build on this study by interviewing different entities that shape counseling in high schools, including district officials, school principals, teachers, counselors, parents, and students. This study can also be expanded through conducting a national study on the stratification of college counseling and reproduction of educational inequalities. Additionally, future research should analyze how gentrification in U.S inner cities have transformed schools, their counseling departments, and students' educational outcomes. Through conducting socially responsible research, together we can find effective ways to guide *every* student on the path to college.

## APPENDIX

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### SECTION A: INTRODUCTION AND COUNSELING CAREER

##### A. Background

1. Can you talk to me about your educational trajectory before becoming a counselor?
2. Why did you decide to become a counselor?
3. How many years have you been a counselor for?
4. How many years have you been a counselor for at this high school?
5. Have you worked as a counselor in other schools? If so, where?

##### B. Current Position

1. Can you tell me about your experience working as a counselor in this school?
2. Do you work with other counselors? If so, tell me about your college counseling team.

#### SECTION B: GUIDANCE OPERATIONS

##### A. Role as Counselor

1. Can you describe your role as a counselor?
2. Please describe what a typical day as a counselor looks like.
  - a. Does it look differently at different times of the year?
3. How many students do you advise at a typical year?
  - a. How are students assigned to counselors at your high school?
4. Does your school and/or district provide you with enough resources to do your job as a counselor?

##### B. Personal and School Expectations on Counselor

1. What expectations does your school have on you as counselor?
2. What expectations do you have on yourself as a counselor?

##### C. College Advising Style

1. Are you flexible with your counseling style, or does the school have a structure for you to follow?
2. How would you describe the way you counsel students?
3. What expectations do you have for your students as a counselor?

##### D. Social/Cultural Capital

1. How would you describe your relationship with your students?
  - a. Probe: Personal, professional, or a combination of both?
2. How do you advise and guide students in making a concrete plan to prepare for college?



3. How do you help students navigate school processes such as selecting colleges, filling out applications, and applying for financial aid and scholarships?
4. What information do you feel is important to pass on to your students for them to be successful in the college application process?
5. Are there resources offered from your school to create a successful college application process for students?

## **SECTION C: PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

### **A. Parental Involvement**

1. In general, how involved are parents in your school?
2. Does the school try to get parents involved? If so, how?

### **B. Parents Expectation on Counselors**

1. Are there expectations that parents set on you as a counselor? If so, which ones?

## **SECTION D: SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS**

### **A. Demography in School**

- a. Can you tell me about the type of students you advise?
- b. Does your counseling style change depending on the type of student you advise?
- c. What are some of the colleges or universities that your students are now attending?

## **SECTION E: SCHOOL AND DISTRICT POLICIES**

### **A. District Policies**

1. What expectations does the district have on you as a counselor?
2. How, if at all, do district and school policies on college counseling for students influence your role as a counselor?

## **SECTION F: CONCLUSION**

1. Is there anything that I did not ask about in our interview that you think would be important for me to know?
2. Do you have any questions for me?

## REFERENCES

- American School Counselor Association (ASCA), 2011. *2010-2011 Counselor to Student Ratio*. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/files/Ratios10-11.pdf>
- Belasco, Andrew S. 2013. "Creating College Opportunity: School Counselors and Their Influence on Postsecondary Enrollment." *Research in Higher Education* 54(7):781-804.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital" Pp. 241-258 in *The Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J.G. Richardson (Ed.). New York: Greenwood Press.
- Bridgeland, John and Mary Bruce. 2011. *School Counselors: Literature and Landscape Review. The State of School Counseling in America*. New York, NY: College Board National Office for School Counselor Advocacy.
- Bryan, Julia, Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy, Cheryl Moore-Thomas, and Norma L Day-Vines. 2009. "Who Sees the School Counselors for College Information? A National Study." *Professional School Counseling* 12(4):280-291.
- California Department of Education. 2017. "2017-18 Annual Income Eligibility Guidelines." Accessed on January 17, 2018. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/mbcnp052017.asp>
- . 2017. "Graduation Requirements" Accessed on February 23, 2018. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/hsgtable.asp>
- Chavez, Christina. 2008. "Conceptualizing from the Inside: Advantages, Complications, and Demands on Insider Positionality." *The Qualitative Report* 13(3):474-494.
- Ceja, Miguel. 2006. "Understanding the Role of Parents and Siblings as Information Sources in the College Choice Process of Chicana Students." *Journal of College Student Development* 47(1):87-104.

- Coleman, James S. 1988. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." *American Journal of Sociology* 94: S95-S120.
- Denner, Jill, Catherine R Cooper, Nora Dunbar, and Edward M López. 2005. "Latinos in a College Outreach Program: Application, Selection, and Participation." *Journal of Latinos and Education* 4(1):21-41.
- DeSilver, Drew. 2014. "College Enrollment among Low-income Students Still Trails Richer Groups." Pew Research Center, Washington DC.  
<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/15/college-enrollment-among-low-income-students-still-trails-richer-groups/>
- DiMaggio, Paul. 1982. "Cultural Capital and School Success: The Impact of Status Culture Participation on the Grades of U.S. High School Students." *American Sociological Review* 47(2):189-201.
- Edwards, Rosalind and Janet Holland. 2013. *What is Qualitative Interviewing?* London: Bloomsbury.
- Espinoza, Roberta. 2011. *Pivotal Moments: How Educators Can Put All Students on the Path to College*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Fenderson, Adam and Jaye Fenderson. 2011. "First Generation."  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfDx4duheHk>.
- González, Kenneth P, Carla Stoner, and Jennifer E. Jovel. 2003. "Examining the Role of Social Capital in Access to College for Latinas: Toward a College Opportunity Framework." *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 2(2):146-170.
- Herbert, Marion. 2012. "Minneapolis Guidance Department Boosts Grad Rates With Online Tool." *District Administration*. March 2012.

<https://www.districtadministration.com/article/minneapolis-guidance-department-boosts-grad-rates-online-tool>

- Hovart, Erin M and Anthony L Antonio. 1999. "Hey, Those Shoes Are Out of Uniform": African American Girls in an Elite High School and the Importance of Habitus." *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 30(3):317-342.
- Hurley, Sarah and Ann Coles. 2015. *College Counseling for Latino and Undocumented Students*. Retrieved from <http://www.nacacnet.org/research/research-data/nacac-research/Documents/NACACElenciaReportFinal.pdf>
- Kao, Grace and Marta Tienda. 1998. "Educational Aspirations of Minority Youth." *American Journal of Education* 106(3):349-384.
- Lareau, Annette. 1987. "Social Capital Differences in Family-School Relationships: The Importance of Cultural Capital." *Sociology of Education* 60(1):73-85.
- Lee, Valerie E and Ruth B Ekstrom. 1987. "Student Access to Guidance Counseling in High School." *American Education Research Journal* 24(2):287-310.
- MacLeod, Jay. 2008. *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- McDonough, Patricia M. 1997. *Choosing Colleges. How Social Class and Schools Structure Opportunity*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- . 1998. "Structuring College Opportunities: A Cross-case Analysis of Organizational Cultures, Climates, and Habiti." Pp. 181-210 in *Sociology of Education: Emerging Perspectives*, edited by Carlos A Torres and Theodore R Mitchell. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- . 2005. "Counseling and College Counseling in America's High Schools." *Alexandria, VA: National Association for College Admission Counseling*.
- McDonough, Patricia M, Anthony L Antonio, and James W Trent. 1997. "Black Students, Black Colleges: An African American College Choice Model." *Journal for a Just Caring Education* 3:9-36.
- National Association of College Admission Counselors (NACAC). 2004. About NACAC.
- National Association of College Admission Counselors (NACAC) and American School Counselor Association. 2018. *State-by-State Student-to-Counselor Ratio Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.nacacnet.org/globalassets/documents/publications/research/state-by-state-ratio-report.pdf>
- Núñez, Anne-Marie and Alex J Bowers. 2011. "Exploring what Leads High School Students to Enroll in Hispanic-Serving Institutions: A Multilevel Analysis." *American Educational Research Journal* 48(6):1286-1313.
- Perna, Laura and Marvin A Titus. 2005. "The Relationship between Parental Involvement as Social Capital and College Enrollment: An Examination of Racial/Ethnic Group Differences." *The Journal of Higher Education* 76(5):485-518.
- Perna, Laura, Heather T Rowan-Kenyon, Scott L Thomas, Angela Bell, Robert Anderson, and Chunyan Li. 2008. "The Role of College Counseling in Shaping College Opportunity: Variations across High Schools." *The Review of Higher Education* 31(2):131-159.
- Phillips, Meredith, Kyo Yamashiro, and Carrie E Miller. 2017. *College Readiness Supports in LAUSD High Schools; A First Look*. Los Angeles Education Research Institute.

- Portes, Alejandro. 1998. "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24(1):1-24.
- Robinson, Karen J and Josipa Roksa. 2016. "Counselors, Information, and High School College-Going Culture: Inequalities in the College Application Process." *Research in Higher Education* 57(7):845-868.
- Romero, Esmeralda F. 2017. "Parents Cite Urgent Need for Counselors in LA Schools Who Can Aid DACA Students." *LA School Report*. January 2017.  
<http://laschoolreport.com/parents-push-for-more-counselors-to-assist-undocumented-students-in-la-schools/>
- Saldaña, Johnny, 2009. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. SAGE Publications.
- Saporito, Salvatore and Deenesh Sohoni. 2007. "Mapping Educational Inequity: Concentrations of Poverty among Poor and Minority Students in Public Schools." *Social Forces* 85(2):1227-1253.
- Schwartz, Sarah, Jean E Rhodes, Christian S Chan, and Carla Herrera. 2011. "The Impact of School-Based Mentoring on Youths with Different Relational Profiles." *Developmental Psychology* 47(2):450-462.
- Stanton-Salazar, Ricardo D. 1997. "A Social Capital Framework for Understanding the Socialization of Racial Minority Children and Youths." *Harvard Educational Review* 67:1-40.
- . 2001. *Manufacturing Hope and Despair: The School and Kin Support Networks for U.S. Mexican Youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.

- . 2011. “A Social Capital Framework for the Study of Institutional Agents and Their Role in the Empowerment of Low-Status Students and Youth.” *Youth and Society* 43(2):1066-1109.
- Turney, Kristin and Grace Kao. 2010. “Barriers to School Involvement: Are Immigrant Parents Disadvantaged?” *The Journal of Education Research* 102(4):257-271.
- U.S Department of Health, Education & Welfare. 1969 “History of Title 1 ESEA.”
- U.S Department of Education. 2004. “Title 1— Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged.” Accessed on January 15, 2018.  
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html>
- . 2014. “Number and Percentage of Public School Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch, by State: Selected Years, 2000-01 through 2012-13.” Accessed on January 18  
[https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14\\_204.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_204.10.asp)
- . 2015. “Improving Basic Programs Operated by Located Educational Agencies (Title 1, Part A).” Accessed on January 15, 2018. <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>
- . 2015. “New GEAR UP Grants Awarded to Help Prepare Students for Success in College.” Accessed on November 25, 2017.  
<https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/new-gear-grants-awarded-help-prepare-students-success-college>
- Valenzuela, Angela. 1999. *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*. New York: State University of New York.
- Walpole, MaryBeth. 2003. “Socioeconomic Status and College: How SES Affects College Experiences and Outcomes.” *The Review of Higher Education* 27(1):45-73.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. 2017. "Income Eligibility Guidelines Announced for School and Day Care Meals." Accessed on January 17, 2018.

<https://dpi.wi.gov/news/releases/2017/income-eligibility-guidelines-announced-school-and-day-care-meals>

Yan, Wenfan and Qiuyun Lin. 2010. "Parental Involvement and Mathematics Achievement: Contrast Across Racial and Ethnic Groups." *The Journal of Educational Research* 99(2):116-127.

Yosso, Tara J. 2005. "Whose Culture has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8(1):69-91.

Yosso, Tara J and Daniel G Solórzano. 2006. *Leaks in the Chicana and Chicano Educational Pipeline: Latino Policy & Issues Brief*, (13). UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.