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## Critical (Re)approach to higher education admission policy: The impact of open enrollment policy implementation

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Critical (Re)approach to higher education admission policy: The impact of open enrollment  
policy implementation

By

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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in Educational Leadership  
in the College of Education

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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2022

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Federal and state policies affecting HE, like the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1832, Brown vs. Board of Education, and HE Act of 1965 have posited change regarding the proliferation of diversity and expansion of access (Thelin, 2011).

I analyzed BOT policies for enrollment and conducted a socio-diagnostic CDA on the implementation of admission policy to understand the impact of the policies' implementation. I focused on 1) exploring how open enrollment (OE) policies were constructed, 2) how institutions adopt and interpret these policies, and 3) how individuals at the institution enact these policies, by conducting a discourse-historical analysis (DHA).

Open enrollment has been extensively studied at junior colleges. However, the impact of open admissions (OA) at 4-year institutions has not been intensely engaged despite its use at these types of institutions. This has left professionals to draw implications for practice from universities and colleges that are different than the ones in which they work. There are conditions that could inhibit the effectiveness of education policy implementation to include: "a lack of focus on the implementation processes when defining policies at the system level; a lack of recognition that the core of change processes require engaging people; and the fact that

implementation processes need to be revised to adapt to new complex governance systems”  
(Viennet & Pont, 2017, p. 6).

I conducted a case study investigation of open enrollment policy at a 4-year public university to understand its implementation and impact on the student experience. I used discourse-historical analysis to guide my analysis of the data.

Implications were creation of a student profile, resource support matrix, and rethink of policy implementation.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Black women that birthed me, supported me, and nurtured me. I am my ancestors' wildest dreams come true, and it is only by the Grace of God that I can be here today. Sherley Lawrence, Lula Kay Wilson, and Yvonne Henderson, this work is for you. Your steadfast prayers, support, encouragement and love built the foundation on which I have stood in pursuit of my goals and dreams. Everything I do is to make you proud. Therefore, as I come to the end of my terminal degree, I hope this dedication serves as a small token of my love and appreciation of the influence you have had on my life. Love you, ShirDonna.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

**Background**

**Public Agenda as a Precipice for Higher Education Change**

Higher education was “one of the greatest hopes for intellectual and civic progress in the country, yet it has been seen as part of the problem and not the solution” (Boyer, 1997, p. 85). Since its establishment in the United States (Cooley, 2015), institutions of higher education and the goals of society have intersected with each other. The relationship between higher education and the public agenda of a society could be described as structural in that differentiation between the goals of both would be quite difficult. While history denoted the benefit of this relationship, less attention was given to those that have been disparaged on the basis that they do not exist in the powered race or socioeconomic majority.

A public agenda, according to Shulock et al. (2017), started with the public imagining “how best to meet public needs through current, new, and/or modified institutions, collaborations, and instructional approaches” (p. 3). However, the public agenda often benefits the majority and/or privileged members of society (Gildersleeve et al., 2010). The discourse surrounding the impact of federal and state legislation on academic communities was found to be increasingly pervaded by public agenda (Gildersleeve et al., 2010). The purpose of higher education, at its core, serves at the pleasure of those who seek its resources; however, as Gildersleeve et al. (2010) note, the unquestioned acceptance of public agenda for change in

higher education without critical investigation is the crux of many operational issues faced today. As such, the creation of policy does not necessarily lead to sustainable progress (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

It would make sense that research on higher education and the process of creating policies to serve underrepresented communities would intuitively lead to the creation of policies that would initiate equitable educational experiences for all. However, researchers have found that it is troubling to consider the disconnect between higher education research and higher education policy, others have stated that policy makers are averse to high-risk policy action unless they feel insured that the outcome will be a favorable political move (Howlett, 2014; McLaughlin, et. al, 2016). Despite constant legislative amendments or policy changes, there were consistent gaps in access and progression through college for marginalized populations.

In relation to higher education, public agenda was claimed to be purposed for reuniting higher education with the larger society. However, consideration was needed to understand the framing of the public agenda and why. Conservative modernization is a social construct that grounds the discourse that operationalizes and perpetuates the marginalization of populations. The concept of conservative modernization detailed policies, such as those purposed for expanding equality in higher education, “serve to undermine certain conceptions of democracy and freedom in education and supplant them with conceptions that serve the ruling class and their private interests” (Gildersleeve et al., 2010).

### **University Admission Policy and Inequity**

Admission practices impact both the operations of the university as well as the overall student experience. According to Boeckenstedt (2014), “the admissions office, especially at highly selective institutions, is the agent that keeps students out of college in the first place, by

creating a game that is heavily skewed in favor of students from high-income, well-educated families” (p. 1). In line with the perspective of Boeckxstedt (2014) an admissions office would also be the gateway that grants entrance to a university based on the institution’s criteria.

Discussing university admissions policies, Danielson and Sander (2004) stated that “many university systems have banned the use of race in university admissions, and both researchers and policymakers tend to assume that these schools are ideal exemplars of the operation and effects of race-neutral policies” (p. 969). However, this ideology negated key factors regarding race and equity. Because of the historical relationship of the United States with race, there is no system absent of the recognition of race. Whiteness being the normed and powered race. Therefore, it could be assumed that the attempt to create race-neutral policies will negatively affect marginalized communities simply because of the normalization of Whiteness.

The process of recruitment to admission to retention to persistence was systemically connected to the organizational structure of an institution. Influenced by federal and state legislation, higher education systems have been a breeding ground for problematic assumptions that should be consistently called into question. However, what we often see is a perpetuation of the same issues which lead to historically marginalized individuals continuing to be negatively impacted or underserved in U.S. higher education.

### ***Institutional Structure and Inequity***

According to Bess and Dee (2008), there were five variables that were independent in the context of university organizational design: environment, technology, goals, culture, and size. These variables had both direct and indirect effects on the organizational design of the university. While organizational design can be defined in multiple ways, it is important to

consider design in relation to internal structure of the organization (Bess & Dee, 2008). This structure included allocation of tasks and responsibilities, reporting relationships, departments, communication, coordination, and integration (Bess & Dee, 2008). Therefore, the internal structure of an institution is the framework that holds these elements together (Bess & Dee, 2008). Understanding institutional organizational structure was paramount in the discussion regarding racial and socioeconomic disparity and inequity.

The debate regarding the root of inequality in the United States has been multilayered. One direction of this argument is that the structural make-up of an institution lends toward treating groups of similar people disproportionately to others, which made the attainment of success more difficult for some people than for others (Lopez et al., 1998). This culture-enforced ideology was apparent in social institutions such as “education, families, and religion” (Lopez et al., 1998, p. 307). Understanding that institutions were tied to the social ecosystem, Lopez et al. (1998) questioned whether the same systems that perpetuate these disparities could, in the same right, challenge them.

Due to social pressure, many higher education institutions readdressed their methods regarding diversity and equitable experiences for students who were members of marginalized populations. Williams and Clowney (2007) observed four driving forces that contribute to higher education institutions increasing their attention to diversity: (a) legal and political dynamics, (b) changing demographics, (c) rise of a postindustrial knowledge economy, and (d) persistent societal inequities. Pursuant to the point made regarding higher education’s alignment with the public agenda, these four motives for change were in alignment with the needs and wants of the larger dominant society. Therefore, it was not surprising when, despite creation of legislation and

policies such as the Civil Rights Act, Higher Education Act, Brown v. Board of Education, or institutional diversity action plans, disparaging experiences for students persist. Because university operation is guided by policy, it is logical to address problematic discourse within educational policies to ascertain the true cause of consistent attainment gaps seen in higher education.

Open enrollment admissions policy was one such policy. Considered to be a type of race-neutral policy, open enrollment policies were used often in American higher education (Hyllegard & Lavin, 1992) to expand access. Specifically, Hyllegard and Lavin (1992) state that “open access policies were designed to increase educational opportunity for economically and educationally disadvantaged minority students, principally blacks and Hispanics who otherwise would have no chance for college” (p. 240). Open enrollment practices were implemented at institutions in the state of Mississippi to offer opportunity to students who did not academically qualify for admission into public universities. Therefore, I found it necessary to investigate the impact of open enrollment policy on the way student affairs professionals enact their roles at higher education institutions. I critically analyzed the higher education open enrollment policy making process to ascertain problematic assumptions that may account for the continued educational gaps limiting equitable access and valuable experiences for systematically marginalized populations of students.

### **Statement of Problem**

I conducted a critical analysis of how higher education professionals’ enactment of their roles, under open enrollment, impacted the student experience. Historical contextualities that informed the creation process for higher education policy impact the student experience.

Specifically, I engaged policies that dictate the admission of students into a university. Using the presented research, education policymakers and university administrators can begin to address the true problems that cause racial and socioeconomic inequity.

### **Problem-Solving and Policymaking**

“Colleges and universities are increasingly called upon to be partners in addressing complex social economic problems in their states and regions” (Weerts et al., 2015). This statement at its surface holds truth. As the university is a microcosm of the larger society, the ability to try and implement changes that could benefit both university and larger community is less complicated. A critical investigation of this statement, however, reveals that colleges and universities need to readdress what was perceived to be the actual problem before the process of “addressing” can take place.

Scholars who have studied policy have recognized the lack of research that grounds national education reform which, in their opinion, has weakened clear and effective application of reform initiatives as well as attainment of their anticipated outcomes (McLaughlin, et. al, 2016). By presenting a new methodological approach in leadership and policy development that intentionally dismantles assumptive discourse and create opportunity to expand the boundaries of understanding, it was possible to begin the process of critically analyzing policy for the purpose of cutting the tie that binds education to persistent inequities. Institutions engaged in collaborative ventures that promoted the values of public engagement in the process of policymaking, underscored a movement away from the traditional model of conveying knowledge from the university to public. A more collaborative model allowed for co-creation of knowledge for social benefit (Weerts et al., 2015). By (re)engaging the processes used to create

higher education policy, it is possible to move away from arbitrary acceptance of facts without proper investigation.

Investigating the policymaking process of higher education policy shed light on the impact of policy. I presented research that showed how higher education policy may feed the disparities and inequitable experiences that persist within college and university culture. With good intention, diversity-specific policies were often created, but their impact lent toward being a symbolic gesture by the university or institutional governing body. The framework used to create diversity-specific policies and normal operational policies are many times laden with assumptions that are steeped in preserving the very system that led to the need of said policies. In the end “change” was ultimately to the benefit of the institution rather than the marginalized populations.

Change based upon critical scholarship, historically, sought to dismantle the systems that perpetuate the position of power given to the majority group. Is equity truly attainable under systems that were built to privilege groups of people? Where do we begin to address these areas of disparity? As mentioned earlier, Lopez et al. (1998) began to trouble the question of whether the systems and institutions that perpetuate disparity could be transformed to dissipate the same disparity.

### ***University Admissions Models***

According to College Admissions Models (2019), there were three types of admissions models: open admissions, threshold admissions, and holistic admissions.

The open admissions model required no submission of reference letters, statement of purpose or intent, standardized test scores. In fact, the only requirement for admission was the ability to show completion of a high diploma or General Education Diploma (GED; College

Admissions Models, 2019). This model was typically utilized in community colleges and/or universities who seek to provide access to higher education despite level of academic preparedness. For admission into universities that use the threshold model, there was a minimum requirement for grade point average and standardized test scores. Often, there was no requirement for personal statements or letters of recommendation; however, the requirements for admittance were explicitly stated. This model was used commonly in public universities (College Admissions Model, 2019). Lastly, the holistic admissions model was attentive to the idea of selectivity. While explicit minimum requirements may not be published, a general synopsis of the previously admitted class is provided to detail a baseline for likelihood of being accepted. This model, as opposed to the prior two, sought to look at the entire curricular and co-curricular resume of a student. Personal statements, letters of recommendation, and other criteria may be asked to qualify for admittance (College Admissions, 2019).

### ***Taxonomy of Admission Processes***

College Admissions Models (2019) notes three types of admissions: open admissions, threshold admissions, and holistic admissions. Traditionally, a university's admissions process is reflective of the institution's mission and goals (Pefetto et al., 1999). The Taxonomy of the Admission Decision-Making Process is a document that is the product of a task force convened by The College Board in 1998 and 1999. The College Board is an educational association whose focus is to provide support toward "academic preparation and transition to higher education for students around the world through the ongoing collaboration of its member schools, colleges, universities, educational systems and organizations" (Perfetto et al., 1999, p. i). In their document, the task force concluded that the best admission model is one that must be created by a university with consideration of the "mission, resources, and culture," any admission model

should be empirically supported, and the university must determine what the “successful student” profile looks like (Perfetto et al., 1999, p. 25). In alignment with the purpose of this study, I wanted to determine if the admission process used at my case institution, also referred to as Green University, coincided or diverged from these recommendations.

Each college and university was created to support different types of educational needs. Students, depending on their needs, will see their educational needs addressed best by varied institutions (Perfetto et al., 1999). The decision on how students are admitted to an institution, which students are admitted to an institution, and its admission model, must be in alignment with the “societal role [the university] elects to play” (Perfetto et al., 1999, p. 5). The description of this role is usually found in the mission statement of the university. Therefore, it was expected that the societal role of a land grant institution would be different than that of a community college or an Ivy League university. According to the Perfetto et al. (1999), there was a broad range of philosophical perspectives on who an institution should admit; however, these perspectives could be narrowed into nine general philosophical models as seen in Table 1.

Table 1

*Philosophical Models of Admission*

<b>Philosophical Models</b>	
<i>Nonselective Perspectives</i>	
	Description
Entitlement	Higher education is an inalienable right and should be made available to everyone.

Table 1 (continued)

<i>Nonselective Perspectives</i>	
	Description
Open Access	College is a natural progression after high school and should be made available to everyone who is qualified.
<i>Capacity to Perform Perspectives</i>	
Meritocracy	Access to higher education is a reward for those who have been most academically successful.
Character	Access to higher education is a reward for personal virtue, dedication, perseverance, community service, and hard work.
<i>Capacity to Benefit Perspectives</i>	
Enhancement	The goal of higher education is to seek out and nurture talent.
Mobilization	Higher education is the “great equalizer” and must promote social and economic mobility.
<i>Potential-to-Contribute Perspectives</i>	
Investment	Access to higher education should promote the greater good and further the development of society.

Table 1 (continued)

<i>Potential-to-Contribute Perspectives</i>	
	Description
Environmental/Institutional	The admissions selection process is designed to meet the enrollment goals and unique organizational needs of the admitting institution while promoting the overall quality of students' educational experience.
Fiduciary	Higher education is a business, and access must first preserve the institution's fiscal integrity.

(Perfetto et al., 1999, p. 5-7)

The nine models listed in table 1 each describe frameworks used in determining how students were evaluated for the purpose of college admission. While no model is purely used by any institution, the models represented a “family” of decision models that were used by universities and colleges. Institutions that were part of a particular admission perspective, selective or nonselective, had a “primary selection criterion which derives from its philosophical roots” (Perfetto et al., 1999, p. 7).

Most admissions offices that used any type of selective process had minimum standards by which students' eligibility for entrance was determined (Perfetto et al., 1999). The selective models were meritocracy, character, enhancement, mobilization, investment, environmental/institutional, and fiduciary. “The primary distinction in how eligibility functions in a selective environment were the degree to which the eligibility criteria are public and

absolute versus subjective, spanning a range of values within which an applicant may or may not be competitively considered” (Perfetto et al., 1999, p. 4). However, this specification is particular to universities that adhere to a selective admission process. Which students were admitted and when, based upon their closeness to explicit and implicit eligibility requirements, was a normed expectation in institutions that use selective models.

The two types of eligibility-based models or nonselective perspectives were entitlement and open access (Perfetto et al., 1999). These models adhered to the idea that admission decisions were not made based upon other applicants but based on the specified eligibility requirements. Eligibility-based processes did not use multiple models. Their admission purpose is based on societal objectives and goals. If a student met the outlined requirements, that student was guaranteed inclusion in the next phase of the admission process, which was sometimes enrollment or registration (Perfetto et al., 1999).

Based on the research presented there was nothing that specified that a university “should not” use multiple models for admission; however, the research did note that each type of model produces a different student profile. Therefore, knowing all the types of admission models used by a university would provide insight to the dynamic spectrum of educational needs of student who were admitted into the university. When considering the implications on practice, understanding the intricacies of these variances was imperative.

Understanding the admissions model used by a university gave keen insight into both the mission and goals of an institution. The sum of the socioeconomic and demographic make-up of a student population produced needs for resources: academic, monetary, or otherwise. In conjunction with the process used to admit students, there should be correlating and consistent

resources available to support those students through their academic careers. This support should exist to assist students based on their academic and socioeconomic profiles, minimally.

**University Admissions in Mississippi.** Some may argue that state public institutions in Mississippi were technically classified as threshold institutions; however, due to a clause in the BOT *Policies and Bylaws*, there was possibility for admittance despite a student not meeting the stated admission criteria (2017). The BOT, which had the authority to “establish minimum standards of achievement as a prerequisite for entrance into any of the institutions under its jurisdiction, which standards need not be uniform between the various institutions and which may be based upon such criteria as the Board may establish” (Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning Board of Trustees, 2017, p. 93), established an admissions process for academic placement resulting from various deficiencies (APVD). Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning Board of Trustees (BOT) *Policies and Bylaws* determined the following to be the guidelines of its open enrollment policy, also known as APVD:

Students who have not demonstrated adequate readiness in English or Reading or Mathematics will be granted Full Admission with Academic Deficiencies to the Summer Developmental Program. This is an intensive program that concentrates on high school subject areas (English, Reading, and Mathematics) that are applicable to success in first-year college courses. These courses carry institutional credit. Students who successfully complete the summer program, by passing the developmental courses that they are determined to be deficient and the Learning Skills Laboratory courses, will receive admission to the fall term with mandatory participation in the Year-Long Academic Support Program or some other Institutions of Higher Learning recognized intervention strategy to promote success in the courses in which they are not fully prepared, according

to ACT subtest scores. Students who fail to successfully complete the Summer Developmental Program are not eligible for enrollment in the regular academic year and will be counseled to explore other post-secondary opportunities, including those offered by community colleges. (p. 96)

Per the College Admission (2019) description of open enrollment, the admissions qualifications were limited to proof of high school or equivalent completion. Similarly, as detailed by the *Policies and Bylaws* (2017) of the BOT, the admissions requirements for public institutions in Mississippi only consistently required proof of high school or equivalent completion. All other metrics such as standardized testing or grade point average could be subbed for an alternative metric which, essentially, guaranteed admission. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, it was empirically sound to operate as if the universities used an open admission admissions model. Connectedly, there are land grant institutions in the state. In accordance with this status, the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 created a pathway for states to build universities dedicated toward increasing access to higher education institutions (Thelin, 2011). This is important to consider because on top of following the admissions procedure outlined by the state, land grant institutions in a state adhere to additional requirements of land grant institutions to provide affordable and practical higher education to state residents (Thelin, 2011).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Through this study, I gained a more comprehensive view of how policy implementation impacted students. Critical analysis of the construction and implementation of higher education policies was the research approach necessary to explain problematic assumptions and practices that may account for the continued educational gaps experienced by systematically marginalized

populations of students. This is especially important as federal and state policies affecting higher education, like the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1832 to the passing of Brown vs. Board of Education, have posited change regarding the proliferation of diversity and expansion of access (Thelin, 2011).

In their paper, Viennet and Pont (2017) discussed education policy implementation as a complex process. Therefore, it is not necessarily a sustainable practice to implement policy across institutional types without acute attention to institutional context. There is an expanse of conditions that could inhibit the effectiveness of education policy implementation to include: “a lack of focus on the implementation processes when defining policies at the system level; a lack of recognition that the core of change processes requires engaging people; and the fact that implementation processes need to be revised to adapt to new complex governance systems” (Viennet & Pont, 2017, p. 6).

By understanding how higher education admission policies were implemented, and critically examining the impact of these policies, policymakers and stakeholders can begin to address the true problems that cause educational inequity and racial disparities in higher education. Because this task is expansive; I focused on 1) exploring how open enrollment policies were constructed, 2) how institutions adopt and interpret these policies, and 3) how individuals at the institution enact these policies, by conducting a discourse-historical analysis. Open enrollment has been extensively studied at junior colleges, and many of its successes have been detailed through the purview of community college systems such as the City University of New York (CUNY). However, as presented in the literature, the impact of open admissions at 4-year institutions has not been intensely engaged despite its use at these types of institutions. This left professionals to draw implications for practice from universities and colleges that are

different than the ones in which they work.

In their article, “Ethical leadership in higher education admission: equality vs. equity,” Caldwell et al. (2007), offered context regarding university admission policies. They found that many non-competitive colleges, which include open enrollment and threshold admission institutions, can admit more students. Connectedly, universities admit students that suit its mission and goals (Perfetto et al., 1999). The goal of the admission practice was directed at supporting the mission of the institution, sometimes the “admission decisions become ethical practices of equity and equality, as admissions officers are ethically bound to strive for both” (Caldwell et al., 2007, p. 15). As higher education institutions admit students yearly, practitioners address how these students were being served in accordance with the pretense by which they were admitted. “Higher education policy and daily admission decisions have the potential to transcend [any specific court decision] and shape future access” (Caldwell et al., 2007, p. 17).

Clarity regarding the connection between admission policy and the later impact on the student experience remain unclear and the social phenomena of access inequality remain a salient issue in higher education. Where these issues intersect is where I focused my study.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that guided this study were: How are state enrollment mandates enacted at case study institution? How are open enrollment practices implemented by practitioners? How do their practices contribute to or interrupt inequalities that they were meant to address?

## **Emergent Conclusions and Importance of Argument**

Based on the research there were two sides of the argument in response to the impact of open admissions policy at a university. One side was that open admissions provides access to students who may not have been able to attend a university without the allowances set up by this policy such as optional placement testing into remedial courses. Often utilized in community college systems, the process of providing education to all who are willing has increased the number of degreed students have traditionally been impeded by socio-economic barriers that impacted their ability for attainment of a college degree (Lavin, 1990).

On the other side of the argument are sentiments that open enrollment was problematic in that it creates space to dilute educational rigor. Opponents of the policy argued that the strain on economic and personnel resources at higher education institutions have a ripple effect on the operational functionality of the university. Academically underprepared students increase the need for remedial courses as well as an increase in university resources that help students with less cultural capital to navigate the university experience. Therefore, this perspective proposes that these needs are unrealistic to achieve as the number of students attending college increases (Reitano, 2003).

Open enrollment policies and practices have been mostly lauded for their specific impact on providing access to higher education and diversifying the higher education landscape; however, there were understudied elements. Research on the effectiveness of open enrollment has been studied in community college systems. However, open enrollment, while utilized in 4-year public institutions, has had little study done to understand its effectiveness and impact in 4-year institutions. Critical analysis of these elements and their associated implications could account for the educational access inequities. Even amidst increased policy and practice changes

to increase access and retention of students, still disparities persist. This was, of course, amplified for individuals who are systematically marginalized. By gaining a more critical and complex understanding of how open enrollment policies were constructed and the reciprocal enactment of practices, beneficiaries of these policies, policymakers, and university stakeholders can begin to address the true problems that cause educational inequity.

## **Theoretical Framework Construction**

### ***Critical Discourse Studies***

To further refine and direct my study, I used critical discourse studies (CDS) to analyze my data. Critical discourse studies were theoretical and methodological approaches that shed new light on open enrollment and open access policies. Critical discourse studies, birthed from a group of scholars at a conference in Amsterdam in 1991, is a school of practices that use problem-oriented approaches and aim to dismantle ideologies and power through investigation of “semiotic data” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 4).

One approach to CDS, discourse-historical analysis (DHA), aimed to “deconstruct the hegemony of specific discourses by deciphering the ideologies that serve to establish, perpetuate or resist dominance” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 25). Discourse-historical analysis was ideal to frame and complicate investigations of open enrollment policy and practices for three reasons. First, DHA focused on interrogating texts (narratives, documents, policies, etc.) and their subsequent performance. Open enrollment practices and policies were inherently discursive in that they were products of written federal and state legislation. Second, DHA provides socio-diagnostic critique, specifically an analysis of the intended and actual effects of discourse. This was especially relevant to open enrollment policies and practices, given the diverging perspectives on their usefulness and impact. Lastly, DHA could yield insights to help inform

future practices by interrogating current practices. A DHA approach increased the congruence between various stakeholders' (state legislators, university administration, and students) interpretations and expectations related to open enrollment or root out deficit-laden approaches to the policy enactment that may subvert the original goal of open enrollment efforts.

## **Define Key Terms**

### ***Equality***

In terms of higher education, equality regarding admissions should be the foundation of “policy and individual decisions” (Caldwell et al., 2007, p. 16). There is a general expectation that all should be treated equally. As such, equality, focuses on a particular person and the situation surrounding that person. Specifically, equality does not direct attention group differences, based on characteristics such as” race, sex, social class, ethnicity, and disability” (Caldwell et al., 2007, p. 16). There is an underlying assumption in equality that a person has fully accepted and been adopted into the ideals of a society. As such, it is presumed that the person should not be hindered by the typical beliefs and stereotypes of the society (Caldwell et al., 2007).

Equality is the unit of measurement used to determine if a university is meeting requirements laid out by federal and state legislation as well as expectations set by societal pressure or norms. University stakeholders, when measuring the achievement of equality after policy changes, assume that all are treated equally under the policy.

### ***Equity***

In making decisions for admissions, equity details that, the goals of a person should coincide with the goals of a society (Caldwell, et al., 2007). Equity diverges from

the concept of equality in that it takes into consideration that there are groups of people that have been marginalized and have not experienced equal treatment and/or have not had a level playing field (Caldwell et al., 2007). In fact, “these groups have been made to feel inferior to those in the mainstream and some have even been oppressed” (Caldwell et al., 2007, p. 16).

Equity considers the intersectionality of marginalized identities. Racial equity, gender equity, socioeconomic equity, etc. are a just a few ways to consider the experiences of students at our institutions. Critical scholars use equity as a unit of measurement to understand the experience of students at universities.

### ***Disparity***

Bahr (2010) states that “race itself is not a cause of disparities; rather is the many correlated facets of inequality that lead to lower preparation and achievement among historically disadvantaged racial groups.” (p. 212). Disparity in connection with equity, exist in the context of any marginalized population.

Racial and socioeconomic disparities, focuses of this study, are the outcomes of system racism and ill-informed assumptions. Disparities are a symptom and typically the focus of study; however, without considering the disease which are racism, white supremacy, and problematic assumptions associated with wealth, the issue is perpetuated and continues.

### ***Race-Neutral Policy***

According to Coleman et al. (2008), the concept of race neutrality in policy for the purpose of increasing access and decreasing disparity has been a consistent point of conversation

and contention. Furthermore, consideration of the racial neutrality of a policy must be determined based on the language and operationalization of the policy. The designation of an educational policy being race-neutral is a designation made by federal law (Coleman et al., 2008).

Federal law has two categories for policies that address access and diversity intentions: race-conscious policy (often lead to stringent scrutiny) and race-neutral policy (Coleman et al., 2008). Throughout their article, Coleman et al. (2008) detail description of the difference between race-conscious and race-neutral policies:

1. *Race-conscious policies* include two types of policies: (1) those that involve explicit racial classifications (such as the University of Michigan Law School's race-as-a-factor admissions policy, where race was an express factor used in evaluating applicants); and (2) those that are neutral on their face but that are motivated by a racially discriminatory purpose, resulting in racially discriminatory effects. Thus, facially neutral policies may in some cases actually qualify as race-conscious, given the underlying motivation. (The question that the U.S. Supreme Court has not definitively addressed in a higher education enrollment management setting is "how much" of a racially discriminatory motivation is necessary in order for such policies to qualify as race-conscious.
2. *Race-neutral policies* include two types of policies: (1) those that, with respect to both operation (read: language) and intent, are neutral; and (2) those "inclusive" outreach and recruitment policies that expand efforts to generate additional applicant interest, which may be facially race-conscious and/or race-conscious in intent, but which do not confer material benefits to the exclusion of non-targeted students. (p. 4)

## **Organization of Dissertation**

The proceeding project consists of a literature review, highlighting the open admissions higher education policy and the associated implications of practice to ascertain problematic assumptions that may account for continued educational gaps limiting equitable access to and through postsecondary education for systematically marginalized populations of students; a description of theoretical and methodological construction of this study, specifically drawing on the theoretical perspective of discourse-historical analysis; an integrated presentation of data and findings; and a discussion of how those findings contribute to literature, and their implications for future research, policy creation/implementation, and practice.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Enrollment and Admissions in Higher Education**

##### **The Origins of Open Enrollment**

Open enrollment, referred to interchangeably as open admissions, is a college admissions model that does not require a student to present scores from a standardized test, submit letters of recommendation or personal statements. The only requirement for admittance is that the student have high school diploma or GED. As described in *College Admissions Models* (2019), this admission model exists for colleges whose purpose and mission seek to ensure that everyone who is willing and wanting have access to post-secondary education. Open enrollment admission policy dates to the 19th century with the passing of the first Morrill Land Grant Act of 1832. Per the specification of the Morrill Act, colleges that were created with funding provided by the 1832 Morrill Act could be attended by any resident of the state that had completed some high school and who were pursuing furthered knowledge in agriculture and mechanical arts (CUNY, 1999). While this is typically utilized in junior colleges and community colleges, as higher education accessibility demands have increased, these policies have been used in larger 4-year public and private institutions (Lavin, 2000).

As an institutional policy, open admissions was implemented first at the CUNY in 1970, and “has been one of the nation’s most ambitious attempts to promote opportunity in higher education” (Lavin, 1990, p. 389). In a time where increased access to college for working class,

Black, and Latino/a people became a necessity due to changing societal demographics, open admissions policies were intended as a “response to demands from students, civil rights organizations, minority elected officials, and civic organizations for access to higher education for historically underserved populations in the city” (Duitch, 2010, p. 4). To fully understand the sociopolitical concerns that preceded the creation of the open enrollment admissions policies, it is important to take a deep dive into federal and state legislation that both directly and indirectly impact higher education.

An open admissions policy, while it may be implemented differently depending on the university, is composed of unique features that provide variance from other college admissions models: i.e. threshold admissions model and holistic admissions model.

Lavin (1990) describes open admissions policy as an admissions process which provides a route for movement between a junior college and 4-year or senior college. This admissions process is for universities that have programs that include courses and/or other resources for academic remediation, advising, and affiliated services to increase a student’s ability to be academically successful, and an associated financial aid policy that will support access of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The objective of the open admissions policy, according to Reitano (2003) was to “draw and keep students in, not to weed them out” (p. 97).

### ***The Emergence of Open Enrollment***

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remediation, advising, and affiliated services to increase a student's ability to be academically successful, and an associated financial aid policy that will support access of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The objective of the open admissions policy, was to increase enrollment not create restriction to admission (Reitano (2003).

**Brown v. Board of Education and the Concept of Choice.** In her article, "Public School Choice and Open Enrollment: Implications for Education, Desegregation, and Equity," Smith (1995) stated "the "[United States] Supreme Court today views Brown [v. Board of Education] as standing for equality of educational opportunity and not as a mandate for integration" (p. 294). To Smith's point, Brown did not successfully end segregation due to its lack of specification and direction. This lack of detail led states to create nondescript legislation that were overarching, such as choice-based policy.

There is contention, even today, between scholars and policymakers. Policymakers posited that the ability to attend a university was evidence that a state has done what is needed to provide equal access to higher education. However, scholars of equity in education argued that choice was a product of the ability to attend college and decide which college he/she wishes to attend. The divorce of these abilities negates a true equitable higher education system. While both points require engagement, for the purpose of this study, I will focus on the later. Education reform, rooted in legislation that was influenced by the concept of student choice, according to Smith (1995), can be generalized by one of three ideological underpinnings. Some stakeholders to include "educators, policymakers, politicians and parents" (p. 256), hold that reform education in a capitalistic society is best achieved when education access mirrors that of a market that allows for competition. Other stakeholders believe that the ability for a student to choose his/her school advocates for equality of access on the basis of race and education. Lastly,

and most relevant to my argument is that a student's choice in where he/she attends school is important because of differences that exist within students' style of learning and teachers' teaching methodologies. Stakeholders invested in the argument believed that the best way to ensure students will be successful and diversity exists within the dynamic of a classroom is to allow students the opportunity to attend any school of their choice (Smith 1995). Detailed, were three very different approaches to desegregation of schools, and there appears to be no clear consensus on which approach would suit best the needs of students and schools.

Evidence of this lack of clarity was seen in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Little was noted in this ruling to provide clear avenues to end segregation in schools. As a result, choice-based policy, such as open-enrollment were birthed in address of ambiguity. As the stimulus for using open enrollment was often rooted in overcoming racism and/or segregation, Smith (1995) posited that there were "dangers inherent in this 'simple' approach that pose a serious threat to school desegregation and integration" (p. 257). Consequently, Smith (1995) recommended that when constitutional requirements led to states implementing open enrollment programs, it was necessary for stakeholders to beware the possibility of re-segregation.

Legislation impacting educational policy was stacked, with the preceding policy impacting the next. Court cases such as *Board v. Brown of Education* affected both K-12 and post-secondary education. Therefore, it was important to understand that the gaps in direction left by a court ruling that was foundational in the creation of federal and state policy that regulate higher education created a lack of specificity in regulatory legislation for education that has been a breeding ground for the perpetuation of disparity in education on all levels.

**Higher Education Act of 1965.** Prior to the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965, federal financial support was limited to areas that were priorities to the nation (Capt, 2013).

However, the HEA allotted \$804 million in funding “community service and continuing education, library assistance, training, research, strengthening developing institutions, teacher programs, and facilities construction” (Capt, 2013, p. 1). The HEA of 1965 not only extended funding support for students, but the federal government also increased purview over the funding provided to states created federal leverage over higher education institutions.

Universities receiving federal funding were required to collect and report institutional data (Capt, 2013). In all, the aim of the HEA was to increase equitable access to education by increasing financial resource availability; however, fast forward to more recent enrollment trends, there was concern if HEA improved equity among college-going students. According to Capt (2013) legislation, directly aimed at impacting education, addresses student ability to access a university; however, where these policies fell short was in addressing if students *can* attend a university.

Providing choice to a student goes beyond access to mean that a student can attend an institution appropriate for his or her desires and academic abilities. Unfortunately, the financial hurdles to elite institutions are still barriers for low-income students. In order to judge the effectiveness of government policy in encouraging choice, the concept needs to be defined within the public policy context. (Capt, 2013, p. 3)

The HEA of 1965 and its reauthorizations provided a means for extended access to higher education via the creation of federally provided financial aid support. However, like *Brown v. Board of Education*, this policy fell short in creating actualized equity. Capt (2013) posits that access exists in terms of ability to attend college and student ability to choose the college they wished to attend. To this point, HEA addressed financial aid resources, but lacked address of extending the feasibility for all students to attend any college. Although legislation and

mechanisms emerged, intended to promote access; women, Black populations, and Hispanic populations were still underrepresented in higher education institutions due to prohibitive costs and institutional admission standards. In the 1970s, continued access barriers led to activists calling for the emergence of programs aimed at diversifying the racial and socioeconomic make up of students attending colleges and universities (Lavin, 2000).

**Equal Protection Clause.** Historically, the *Brown v. Board of Education* has been heralded as a landmark court case in its ruling that ‘separate but equal’ was unconstitutional. However, due to lack of intentionality, *Brown v. Board of Education* did little for substantive change. Why was this the case? The *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling was another example of federal court case that was created to aid equality through outlawing segregation in schools; however, because the policy did not address the systemic underpinnings and ideologies that reproduce hegemonic societal structures, disparity in education continued. Lack of adherence to guidelines set by the Equal Protection Clause, created under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of the United States was the cause of the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Therefore, in seeking to understand the ideological progression of the creation of open enrollment and the subsequent impact of the policy on students required study of the Equal Protection Clause.

Kelley (2018) states that the Supreme Court has only identified two circumstances, per the precedent made by the Equal Protection Clause, where it was necessary to engage policy that was conscious of race: “(1) remedying specific, intentional discrimination, and (2) pursuing diversity in higher educational institutions to procure the benefits thereof and avoid racial isolation.” (p. 137). As the regulation provided by the Equal Protection Clause was directed toward microscale action as opposed to macroscale, the actual movement away from a

disparaged higher education system was unsuccessful. Scholars found that there was need to address education reform on a national level in order for true change to occur. However, the question still bore asking: why is there a consistent disconnect between intended policy outcomes and actualized outcomes? The disconnect came from the philosophical perspective and the methodology used to first create the policy and then the methodology used to study its impact or effectiveness.

Bell (1980) found that, alone, the Equal Protection Clause could not provide equal access for Black people. According to his theory of Interest-Convergence, the epistemological perspective of the Equal Protection Clause, regarding higher education, would ultimately regress toward the disparity of marginalized populations. Interest-Convergence asserts that, “the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interest of Whites” (Bell, 1980, p. 523). At any point that a proposed change would impede upon the power or privilege of affluent Whites, the Equal Protection Clause would fail (Kelley, 2018).

According to Bell, this trend has been present always, even in the overturning of ‘separate but equal’. “All content-neutral definitions of race relations attain their neutrality by ignoring past injustices and unfair advantages that whites as a group have acquired through racial discrimination and subordination” (Smith, 1995, p. 294). There existed, always the opportunity to create an environment that would allow all the equal opportunity to achieve an intended goal. However, that opportunity was often eclipsed by the structural ideology that allows power and privilege to persist. The choice to remain ignorant of this hegemonic system is why segregation persists in institutional policies and practices.

### *Historical Context/Backdrop*

From the 1920s through the end of World War II, it was simple to equate remedial reading and study skills to unsatisfactory academic performance (Baker, 1993; Boylan, 1995; Ignash, 1997; Maxwell, personal communication, 1998; McMillan et al., 1997; Ravitch, 1974). Early colleges and universities provided access to small segments of the population, particularly the well-educated and those from high socioeconomic statuses. However, the Baby Boom era and the G.I. Bill led to a large influx of underrepresented students into the higher education system. Federal and state legislators along with university stakeholders found themselves seeking resolve for the political and societal strains caused by attendance disparity in colleges and universities. There appeared to be no immediate resolve or direction; therefore, this era also saw the implementation of different policies and practices to address admissions standards and access disparity.

The 1950s was an era marked by increased cooperation between high schools and colleges to ensure that students entering college were academically prepared. This statistic led to universities being more selective in their admissions process, requiring core classes be completed, submitting a written interest letter, and taking standardized tests (Sjogren, 1982). Then the children born during the baby boom of 1946 to 1964 began to go to college.

The mid-sixties saw rapid growth in higher education. “The number of eighteen-year-olds in the population had increased significantly and the rate of college attendance of eighteen-year-olds continued to increase (from 26% in 1963 to 31% in 1967)” (Sjogren, 1982, p. 14). The measures taken by the government to abate the issues caused by so many individuals entering college at the same time led to a flood of calls to reform education due to an “alleged decline in academic standard and for encouraging a pluralism that led to ‘cultural dilution’ of college

curricula” (Lavin, 1990, p. 390). There was a national call for “equality of opportunity” (Lavin, 1990, p. 389). In pursuit of this goal policymakers implemented grant and loan programs, particularly in the South, to expand access to universities toward Black people and working-class Whites. (Lavin, 1990). Atop this polarizing issue, in approach of the 1970s, the government began to cut funding toward higher education, and opponents of access expansion struck the argument that expansion of higher education action led to decreased academic rigor.

Additionally, 4-year institutions began testing prospective students in order assess who was and “underachiever” from “low-ability” aspirants to only admit the “better” underprepared students (Baker, 1993; Boylan, 1995; Ignash, 1997; Maxwell, personal communication, 1998; McMillan et al., 1997; Ravitch, 1974, p. 10). Standardized testing was instituted in states, such as Florida, to made sure that university entrants were meeting the base academic requirements to ensure their ability to navigate the university (Lavin, 1990). The explanation for the lack of academic preparedness also changed. “Education professionals began to cite environmental and socioeconomic factors as the primary causes of poor academic performance, and ‘compensatory’ replaced ‘remedial’ as the term of choice to describe the extra education these students required” (Perfetto, et al., p. 10, 1999).

The progression of the chain of events was the catalyst that led states to interpret federal education legislation into policy that outlined guidelines for practice.

### **Community Colleges and Open Enrollment**

The discussion of how open enrollment admissions came to be and how it affects postsecondary education must be first discussed in terms of community colleges as this policy was first implemented at a system of community colleges, CUNY. Junior colleges or community colleges “date back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when state policymakers, recognizing that

geography and cost were barriers to attendance at senior colleges, they created junior colleges to provide lower-division course work in more accessible locations and at a lower price” (Lorenzo, 1993, p. 113).

Born out of a lack preparation by public high schools, students wanting to enter college were increasingly unprepared for collegiate academic rigor, and cities, such as New York were growing in need for an educated workforce (Perfetto et al., 1999). According to the report completed by Open Admissions and Remedial Education at the CUNY, Task Force on the CUNY, since the latter part of the 1800s, there has been difficulty in navigating need versus feasibility of remedial coursework in higher education institutions (Perfetto et al., 1999). Therefore, it was necessary to devise a process to facilitate the navigation of students through college who needed subject remediation. Using the system of junior colleges as a way to collect most of the remedial student population ((Baker, 1993; Boylan, 1995; Ignash, 1997; Maxwell, personal communication, 1998; McMillan et al., 1997; Ravitch, 1974) was an effective method of managing students coming through the university system. In order to increase and expand educational opportunities, CUNY created the open-admissions policy.

### ***Implementation of Open Enrollment (CUNY)***

As previously stated, there were variations in how open admission policy is enacted, and typically there is some alignment with the goal of the college and sometimes the larger public agenda. Specifically, at CUNY, the admissions process expanded to guarantee admittance to students who graduated with either an 80 average or ranked in the upper 50 percent of their graduating class (Lavin, 1990). Somewhat similarly, the Texas Top Ten Percent Plan of 1998 that guaranteed admission to the University of Texas to all high school students that graduated

with the top ten percent of their graduating class (Forbath & Torres, 1998; Tienda & Sullivan, 2010).

Secondly, to increase the chances that a student may obtain their baccalaureate degree, students who graduated from community colleges had guaranteed admission into 4-year institutions (Lavin, 1990). This changed the perspective of 2-year colleges to be a mechanism for educational advancement as opposed to an end point. Additionally, academic remediation services were provided because of open-admission policy to heighten the chance that a student would be academically successful. In connection, should a student fall below minimum academic standards, s/he would be given a grace period during their freshman year, and would not be academically dismissed (Lavin, 1990). “CUNY committed itself to the open door that would not only admit students but make every effort to retain them” (Reitano, 2003, p. 97). This process was likened to academic forgiveness and academic probation often seen in universities today. Lastly, to round out the policy, an aspect of financial aid was included to where all students went to school tuition-free (Lavin, 1990).

While there were no lack of issues and concerns pertaining to the open admissions policy, thousands of students gained access to higher education, who, without the creation of this policy, would not have been able to attend college. Additionally, many these students earned degrees (Lavin, 1990). In 1999, however, despite the gains noted by the implementation of open enrollment, the CUNY Board of Trustees removed resources, monetary and otherwise, that supported remediation.

The period after 1999 is described as the post-open admissions era. Reitano (2003) presented three overarching characteristics that defined this era. First, the mission of the CUNY changed to prioritize the strengthening of colleges and specific degree programs to achieve

ranking in the top 20% of public colleges and universities in the United States. It was noted by Reitano (2003) that this change of purpose was to “compensate for the damage done by open admissions and restore the reputation [the university system] had in the 1950s when it was considered the Harvard of the Proletariat” (Reitano, 2003, p. 98). The university was seeking to go back to the academic prominence it had prior to the strides made to diversify the institution. Therefore, it could be assumed that the university expanded access to traditionally marginalized populations by lowering academic admissions standards. As such, there were questions to be answered as to whether the university ever employed the correct methodologies to assess then address the lack of diversity within the university system. Bacchi (1999) stated “Policy-makers employed formulaic steps in policy-making, and decisions were assumed to be “relatively straightforward” and were “clearly formulated in advance”” (p. 18). Policymaking, according to Bacchi, deferred to the acceptance of a problem as an unquestioned fact. As there was no critical investigation of whether the unquestioned problem was the actual issue, all energy is devoted to identifying solutions to the stated problem (Iverson, 2012). Essentially the process of creating policy never investigated validity or subjectivity of the problem.

Secondly, enrollment increase with no change in the diversity was a noted characteristic of the post open admissions era (Reitano, 2003). Upon review of the data from one of the community colleges in New York, upon the removal of the policy in 1999 “CUNY attracted 5.4% more White and Asian students compared to 5.4% less African American and Hispanic students” (Reitano, 2003). Connected to this statistic is the drastic change in the admission statistics of Black and Hispanic students who applied to the university in comparison to the number of White and Asian students who applied. “Forty-two percent of African American and Hispanic applicants (compared to 21% of White applicants and 27% Asian applicants) were

denied admission to the senior colleges after [scholastic preparedness testing]” (Reitano, 2003, p. 98). Ultimately, the post open admissions era in the CUNY system showed noted disparity and disproportionate admittance of underrepresented populations, a trend opposite of the stated intention of the open admissions policy.

The policy created no change in the structural functionality of the university system. The policy was a quick fix for 26 years; however, once removed, it was quickly revealed that no systemic change had occurred to create equitable access for students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds. In studying organizations, it is important to consider how the “structure may determine its flexibility and capacity to change” (Wikipedia, 2018b). Therefore, structure is an important issue for management. The acceptance that a policy will be created and produce the desired outcomes without consideration of the contextual and environmental issues would inevitably render the policy ineffective.

### **Implementation of Open Enrollment (Excelsior)**

It was interesting to consider Excelsior College. Excelsior College is a 4-year private, non-profit college in Albany, New York with 36,500 students (Wikipedia, 2018a). In 1971 the Regents of the State of New York created Excelsior as an ‘open’ institution with funding from the Ford and Carnegie Foundations for “those who had historically not been well served by more traditional forms of higher education. Anyone with a high school diploma or a GED was afforded admission” (Ebersole, 2010, p. 24). Notably, the “open-enrollment philosophy was given many mid-career adults a second chance at earning a degree. It has also provided many minority students access to higher education and economic growth” (Ebersole, 2010, p. 24). To fulfill its commitment to their philosophical approach of open enrollment, the Regents used several methodologies for earning credits that are particular to the college. Cited as having one

of the best advising structures, Excelsior, despite enrollment increase, had advisors that make individualized learning plans for all students (Ebersole, 2010).

Secondly, the college operated under an external-degree model. While students must complete a capstone assessment at Excelsior, they were able to transfer all coursework toward their degree to Regents (Ebersole, 2010). Both associate's and bachelor's degrees were earned through a process that evaluates prior learning for degree relevance. Using the requirements set by the New York State Department of Education, "areas of deficiency can be satisfied through one of five options: transfer credit from another institution, credit for training, credit for examination, credit by assessment, or coursework at Excelsior" (Ebersole, 2010, p. 25).

Additionally, the College provided resources that were expectedly needed by students enrolled at an open enrollment institution: assistance with writing and computational skills, 24-hour tutoring, coaching support for life-family, work, financial, and time management concerns, library support team, and peer networks (Ebersole, 2010). Doyle (2010) found that the "National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education has found that open-access colleges such as Excelsior were responsible for the greatest gains in graduation rates over the past decade" (p. 29). This institutional review presented a successful case of open enrollment implementation at non-junior college; however, it was important again to state that this institution is a 4-year private institution whose resources and mission directly enable the success of the open-door policy.

The literature surrounding open door/admission/enrollment policy implementation was virtually non-existent regarding 4-year public institutions despite its use in these institutions. Inquiry was necessary to engage this policy's impact based on institution type.

## **Effectiveness of Open Enrollment**

The creation of open-enrollment admission policies on state and institutional levels was on such approach to reducing barriers and increasing diversity in higher education institutions. During the creation and implementation of the open admissions policy, there was concern that the value of the degrees awarded would be diminished creating ‘easier’ access to college (Lavin, 1990); however, under the policy, large numbers of students entered and completed postgraduate degrees at both CUNY and non-CUNY institutions, which demonstrated the transferability and validity of the education obtained. Lavin (2000) conducted an additional review of the CUNY open access policy and noted, up to this point, four distinctive areas where the open-admissions policy showed to be an mechanism for access into higher education for traditionally marginalized populations: (1) marked increase in overall student attendance, specifically the freshman class, (2) increase in Black and Hispanic students, (3) widened pathway to baccalaureate, (4) three-fourths of Blacks and Hispanics would not have qualified for admittance. However, Lavin does not indicate whether this statistic was due to a lack of academic preparedness in high school or inequitable application and admissions processes. Additionally, the amount Black student entrants completing their associate degree increased by more than three times the original amount because of the policy. The same result was seen in Black students’ attainment of bachelor’s degrees, while Hispanic student bachelor’s degree attainment doubled (Lavin, 2000).

In 1996 the open admissions policy had been in effect for 26 years. In their study reviewing the effectiveness of the open admissions policy, Lavin & Hyllegard (1996) found that the policy, specific to Black and Hispanic students, had created noteworthy benefits. These students had “earned 33 million dollars more than they would have because the program enabled

them to go to college” (pp. 107-118). While only 43% of open admissions students obtaining a full-time job were Black or Hispanic students, they were the beneficiaries of more than half the financial growth. In her article, Constance Iloh (2018) stated that great changes had been made over the past twenty years including “the heightened participation of post-traditional students, high reentry and mobility of students within and across sectors, and the increased visibility of open admissions institutions, such as community colleges and for-profit colleges” (p. 227). She particularly placed importance on the institutions these students were attending. Iloh suggested that postsecondary education had entered a state of dualism where half of students were enrolling in selective/competitive institutions and the other half were siphoned into community colleges, for-profit institutions, or other sub-baccalaureate institutions (Iloh, 2018).

Why was the consideration of college ‘choice’ important? According to Traub, et al. (2017) racial disparity had not subsided in higher education by simply expanding access. In fact, the average White student was 7.2 times wealthier than Black students and 3.9 times wealthier than Latino/a students who attended college. The importance of contextual factors, of opportunity, time, and information and their interdependent relationship in college choice and pathways must be considered in the context of post-traditional students, reentering as well as highly mobile college students, and open admissions institutions (Iloh, 2018). This according to Iloh (2018) was the reason “Black and Latino students are underrepresented at the nation’s most well-funded and well-resourced selective 4-year colleges and universities but overrepresented at more open-access and under-resourced 2-year colleges” (p. 228).

### ***Open Enrollment Student Profile***

What is the typical open enrollment student? In her article “The Open-Door Policy: Hidden barriers to postsecondary education for nontraditional adult learners,” Deepa Rao (2004)

defined the major beneficiaries of open enrollment were nontraditional students. The nontraditional students typically do not enter college right after high school, they obtained a diploma alternative such as a GED, and/or have dependents. Case studies and research done on universities using open enrollment convey much of the same information, depicting open enrollment as being beneficial to low achieving, low socioeconomic and marginalized populations of students; however, the specific number of students admitted to college under the pretenses of open enrollment in the regard of ethnic and racial make-up, and/or the gender are statistical figures that do not frequent the research. Seçkin Özsoy (2004) recognizes the following regarding student profiles:

In official statistics, the student population appears as if it is a classless and amalgamated group, existing apart from all the other social belongings. Seen as an undifferentiated mass, the student population in these statistics comes to be an entity that is open to every kind of categorization, according to the researcher's intention and aim. Instead of these abstract and official statistics, having no real correspondence in actual student life, the student profile studies that question the traditional epistemology and methodology concerning the student reality have a theoretical and practical value. (p. 329)

Between 30 to 40% of students required remediation coursework who were admitted because of open enrollment policy provisions. The policy granted college admission to those lacking proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics (Rosenbaum, 1997). There was little to no research depicting the profile of a student admitted via open enrollment. This lack of information was a disservice to the students we, as higher education professionals, seek to serve. The aim attempted to develop student profiles required the identification, quantification, and statistical representation of certain characteristics of the individuals who are in a particular type

and at a certain level of education (Özsoy, 2004). According to Reitano (2003) the open admissions policy “embodied the radical notion that learning should not be the exclusive province of the elite, especially not in a democratic society. This democratic pluralism defined the first and most important leg of the community colleges’ core mission” (p. 96). In this recognition, however, there was no discussion of how this policy effected the mission of 4-year or senior colleges outside of the context that the policy extended the mission of community and junior colleges to the operation of senior colleges. To fully understand the impact or effectiveness of open enrollment, development of a student profile, based on university type and student demographics, was necessary.

### **Beneficiaries of Open Enrollment**

During the 1960s and 1970s, more students from underrepresented populations were graduating from high school, and with the passage of the HEA of 1965, there was extension of access to educationally and economically disadvantaged students (Baker, 1993; Boylan, 1995; Maxwell, personal communication, 1998; Ignash, 1997; McMillan et al., 1997; Ravitch, 1974). However, while larger amounts of Black and Hispanic students were graduating from high school, there remained a disproportionate amount of these students entering compared to completing college due to substandard preparation these students received. Astin (1971) presented an argument made by Julian Stanley, a professor from Johns Hopkins University, “high school grades and test scores predict college grades just as well for disadvantaged students as they do for advantaged students, disadvantaged students who are admitted under special criteria will tend to perform below regularly admitted student” (p. 638). Connectedly, if students that were allowed special admittance based on their race or socioeconomic status, there became a positive correlation between academic disparity, race and economic status. According to Astin

(1971), if this argument were to remain true, without critically diving into all the factors that attribute to academic predictors of success, then by the same logic a student graduating from high school in 1950 and a student graduating from high school in 1970, having learned the exact same things, would be equally successful in college if they attended a university at the same time. However, what Astin (1971) was seeking to argue was that Stanley's argument did not consider educational objectives of the institution. In short, academic predictors of success can change for any group of students if they are aligned with the educational objectives of the university. Universities, required by legislation such as the HEA of 1965, increased access to marginalized populations; however, they did not address the organizational structure that would have allowed better success rates for Black and Latino/a students.

Postsecondary education became a focal point for the attention of the federal government, which ultimately led to intervention measures in the South to initiate the desegregation of universities (Lavin, 1990). Many efforts, through policy implementation, were taken to abate the disproportionality of higher education based on race. "Grant and loan programs at the federal and state levels, expansion of postsecondary institutions, and special admissions programs targeted to minorities increased enrollment in higher education, especially that of minority students" (Lavin, p. 390, 1990). Secondly, to supplement education disparity, exasperated by the increase of marginalized students into higher education, remediation education became a prevalent tool. Instead of remedial courses being only a service provided by community colleges, they became a major function of 4-year institutions ((Baker, 1993; Boylan, 1995; Ignash, 1997; Maxwell, personal communication, 1998; McMillan et al., 1997; Ravitch, 1974). Policy stakeholders still believed that education deficits were fully caused by socioeconomic factors; however, they negated cultural, individual, and learning style differences. With these

additions came a terminology change: developmental education. This concept sought to put academic potential at the forefront as opposed to academic shortcomings (Baker, 1993; Boylan, 1995; Maxwell, personal communication, 1998; Ignash, 1997; McMillan et al., 1997; Ravitch, 1974). Additionally, calls for reform due to the lack of racial diversity in higher education, a group of activists occupied buildings at CUNY and set out demands to greatly increase the presence of marginalized groups in the spring of 1969. Eventually, this led the board of the school system create a way to “guarantee every graduate of a New York City High School a place in the university, beginning the fall of 1970 (Lavin, 1990, p. 392). In 1970 CUNY implemented the open admissions policy.

### **Open Enrollment as Remediation**

Attention must be given to how course remediation played a role in the over implementation of open enrollment. “Developmental or remedial education is defined as a class or activity intended to meet the needs of students who initially do not have the skills, experience or orientation necessary to perform at a level that the institutions or instructors recognize as ‘regular’ for those students” (Perin, 2006, p. 339).

What is the goal of higher education? Astin (1971) presented three separate goals for any university system: elitist, egalitarian, and remedial. Under an elitist goal only the best and most bright were deserving of an education. An egalitarian plan suggested that all have the right to education and the number of resources should be equally distributed despite level of ability. Lastly, advocates of a remedial or "social welfare" plan felt that special attention should be devoted to the lowest-performing and most disadvantaged members of the society” (Astin, 1971, p. 630). While the elitist perspective was more obviously problematic in the conversation regarding access, the distinction between egalitarian and remedial structures was where

discernment was necessary. While both elitist and remedial plans would see all being granted opportunity to an education, a remedial plan would invest a disproportionate amount of the higher educational resources in the education of these low performers” (Astin, 1971, p. 630). The implicit alignment of universities with elitist methodologies under the guise of egalitarian proclamation negating the need for remedial practices was the conundrum in which higher education found itself.

Remediation was dated back to the early years of Harvard College. However, more related to today, remediation was mainly used in 2-year colleges prior to the end of World War II. However, along with the expanse of higher education access due to increased amounts of students entering college, remediation courses were also offered at 4-year institutions. In studying open enrollment implementation at CUNY, the period between 1976 and 1990 was known as the institutionalization of remediation (Open Admissions, 1999). According to the Open Admissions and Remedial Education at the CUNY, Task Force on the CUNY (1999) this period came about due to two trends: deteriorating academic rigor of public schools and lowered admissions criteria to college along with increased recruiting in failing public schools. Ultimately student access increased, but “a major confrontation between growing public demand for public higher education access and anger over continuing racial and class inequalities” (Brier, 2017, p. 31) persisted.

When discussing open enrollment and its connection with remediation coursework, research by in large discussed these courses in terms of how they play out at community colleges. Again, the impact of remedial coursework, particularly regarding its effectiveness has primarily been studied in community college settings. Remediation was a defining attribute of open admissions institutions; therefore, removal of remedial course from open enrollment

universities and having a lack of understanding of its impact at 4-year institutions could lead to an ineffective learning environment for students. At the point that remediation departs from intentionality related to the allocation of resources, the success of those who needed the remediation becomes a disparaging statistic.

### **University Responses to Open Enrollment**

Open enrollment policies have been used often in American Higher Education (Hyllegard & Lavin, 1992). Specifically, Hyllegard and Lavin (1992) stated that “open access policies were designed to increase educational opportunity for economically and educationally disadvantaged minority students, principally Black and Hispanic students who otherwise would have no chance for college” (p. 240). Open-access and similarly name policies were often the by-product of federal and state involvement based on societal pressures; however, as Gildersleeve et al. (2010) notes, the unquestioned acceptance of public agenda for higher education without critical investigation was the crux of many operational issues faced today. Simply stated, “education policymaking does not always lead to sustainable progress” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

The research suggests that the outburst of diversity stimulated actions was birthed out of necessity and reactive practice. Williams and Clowney (2007) observed four driving forces that contribute to higher education institutions increasing their attention to diversity: (a) legal and political dynamics, (b) changing demographics, (c) rise of a postindustrial knowledge economy, and (d) persistent societal inequities. Due to the recognition of these forces, “institutions have enacted diversity policies, implemented aggressive minority recruitment plans, created multicultural centers, and hired additional staff to program multicultural events for the entire campus community” (Wilson, 2013, p. 434).

Attributed to actions of universities due to pressure from student groups, community

influence, and nation-wide current events, higher education administrators have found that “despite their best efforts to create environments that are conducive and receptive to diversity, some institutions have been ineffective due to opposition or lack of commitment on campus from multiple groups including the administration” (Wilson, 2013, p. 434). Some researchers speculated that it is troubling to consider the disconnect between higher education research and higher education policy, others state that policy makers were averse to high-risk policy action unless they feel insured that the outcome will be a favorable political move (Howlett, 2014; McLaughlin, et. al, 2016). Many public agendas, as seen in the creation of varied policies, claimed to be purposed for reuniting higher education with the larger society; however, as the social construct of conservative modernization explains, many of these policies “serve to undermine certain conceptions of democracy and freedom in education and supplant them with conceptions that serve the ruling class and their private interests” (Gildersleeve et al, 2010).

In what was referred to as a ‘post-affirmative action era,’ argument was made by researchers and practitioners, in the field of higher education that there must be a more deliberate focus placed on the process and methods by which universities are held accountable for continued diversity efforts (Maramba, et al., 2015). The increase of attention given to laws such as Title IX and the American’s Disability Act of 1990 has led to greater emphasis placed on the inclusion of those that have historically been associated with marginalized populations. According to Wilson (2013) “attention to diversity has expanded over the last century to include gender issues, racial and ethnic differences, and to a lesser extent, sexual orientation, religion, and physical disability” (p. 433). As a result of the diversity movement, “many institutions of higher learning are preparing their graduates to be more diversity conscious and to be able to work with individuals from many cultures by increasing opportunities of exposure to and

interaction with diverse populations” (Wilson, 2013, p. 433).

As was expected, universities have responded in varied ways. According to research, the responses tend to fall into similar categories: creation of race-neutral policies, chief diversity officer positions, and diversity action plans. These responses come as the result of research that emphasizes the benefits of diversity; however, Maramba et al. (2015) invite the consideration and recognition that:

While much research has concentrated on the explanation of the benefits of increasing the diversity of students in universities very little has focused on the discursive policy development process such as an examination of how stakeholders (students, administrators, policymakers, etc.) discuss ways to ensure that higher education institutions effectively continue diversification efforts. (p. 754)

Another way of looking at this statement is by thinking about the ways in which diversity is discussed in literature. Discourse surrounding people of color, often referred to as diversification, is negative in connotation. “These discourses construct images of people of color as outsiders, at-risk victims, commodities, and change agents” (Iverson, 2007, p. 586). This same research is then used to create policies and stimulate ways in which campuses can become more “inclusive”. The reality, however, is that without notice, the core problem has already been replicated. In her findings, Iverson (2007) argued that “discursive representations (re)produce a subordination of people of color and re-inscribe a racially neutral conception of educational policies—even in policies that have as their focal point diversity in general and race in particular” (p. 593). Considering this information, a valid argument can be given to the ideology behind the creation of such policies.

The literature presented provides insight on the connection between institutional diversity goals and access. Open enrollment is a process employed at institutions in states such as Mississippi to offer opportunity to students who do not academically qualify for admission into public universities. Therefore, it is necessary to interrogate how the construction and enactment of an open enrollment policy influences how underrepresented populations are served.

### ***Pros and Cons of Open Enrollment***

With its beginnings in community college systems, open door policy was implemented for the “American ideal of an open society where every person is given a chance to move between class strata regardless of their condition of birth” (Hendrick et al., 2006, p. 628). Traditional 4-year institutions lacked the flexibility and willingness to provide equitable access to the changing demographic of student attempting to go to college; therefore, community colleges bore in their mission to create space for non-traditional students such as commuters, part-time students, and employed students (Hendrick et al., 2006). However, during times of economic trouble, open door policy colleges were threatened.

When state government funding was lessened, higher education needs were often a part of the first programs to lose money (Hendrick et al., 2006). While the deep connection to the mission of community colleges has allowed the open enrollment policy to prevail, this does not negate that financial toll of education is blamed on the expansion access to students. Most recently, the open-door policy has become the target of blame for “continued student population growth, increased accountability, and less discretionary funding” (Hendrick et al., 2006, p. 630). While the first two factors were considered as inconsequential, the decreased funding was problematic for the purpose of resourcing. It is important to note that the successes and downfalls of the open-door policy was being discussed in the context of a community college.

## **Critiques of Open Enrollment**

Critique of open enrollment was limited because of the lack in breadth of research. Open enrollment frames higher education access toward Black and Hispanic students from a deficit perspective. As such, there is question regarding its outcomes' effectiveness toward marginalized populations of students.

African American and Hispanic access to higher education was depicted in such a way that would suggest a lack of preparedness or readiness for education at a collegiate level; however, the presence and success of African Americans in universities could be dated back to the pre-Civil War Era and Latinos are the fastest growing enrollment population (Santiago & Brown, 2004).

Michael Fultz (2012) stated that “an incomplete understanding of African American higher education has often led to distorted comparisons between Black and White colleges and universities at different stages of their historical evolutions” (p.18). He argued that the normalization of schools for white students subsequently framed deficient mentality toward schools for Black students. In his book chapter “City Normal Schools and Municipal Colleges in the Upward Expansion of Higher Education for African Americans” Michael Fultz (2012) described how the teacher training provided by normal and municipal colleges “drove the development of any sense of ‘higher education’ for African Americans in the aftermath of the Civil War. Fultz (2012) argued that normal schools were framed as being ‘less than’ in historical contexts due to the limited labeling of what constituted a ‘college’ or ‘university’. Therefore, the benefits provided by normal schools were masked. Fultz stated that “in the first two-to-three decades after the Civil War, the majority of the institutions established by Black or White philanthropy, or by state authorities, to provide some degree of higher education for African

Americans were normal schools” (p. 18). Normal schools were instrumental in the education of Black students.

Alexander Astin (2017) surmised that equity disparities are the result of universities’ obsession with ‘smartness’. This obsession was noted in how open enrollment was used as a policy for college admission, SAT and ACT standardized testing, and grading as the sole method for assessing academic success. As an example, he found that in looking at college admissions practices across the country, competition for smart students is intertwined with college rankings which showed a positive correlation with profit gains and faculty attraction to the university (Astin, 2017). However, to “equate student ‘smartness’ with [grade point averages] and scores on standardized tests greatly oversimplifies the remarkable diversity of human talent” (Astin, 2017, p.25). More specific to open enrollment, Astin (2017) states that “open-access state systems mask an important truth about American postsecondary education: the opportunities available to students with differing levels of academic preparation are far from equivalent” (p. 22). In his article, Astin (2017) makes the argument that traditionally resources have been disproportionately invested to favor students that with the highest levels of academic preparation. He proposes that as long as these and related methodologies continue, higher education will continue to lamely address the issues that perpetuate an inequitable society.

In “Rethinking open access”, Scherer and Anson (2014) critiques open enrollment policies as well as presents different ways to approach open access admission policy. Beginning with a brief history of open admissions and referencing its start in the 1970s, the article then focuses on the shortcomings and negative outcomes of the policy such as an increase in the amount of underprepared students enrolling in college, failing out of school, high rates of stopping out, and all of these changes seeking college degrees, that are not academically

prepared, are making it difficult to preserve high academic standards. Scherer and Anson (2014) state that “students in beginning credit-bearing courses of degree programs now attempt—and frequently fail—to demonstrate master of numeracy and literacy objectives on a par with those well established for early elementary schoolchildren” (p. 1). However, the authors suggest that research supports updating this policy to promote the educational goals of the nation: “improved college readiness and completion, increased financial support for promising low-income students, and efficient use of public and private resources” (Scherer & Anson, 2014, p. 2). The authors reference Colorado’s State Board for Community Colleges as an example. They note that due to updates in Colorado’s open-access policy they were able to see benefits regarding decreased financial aid burden on students and taxpayers. The crux of their argument rested in the presumed financial strain on taxpayers and universities that provided access to underprepared students presents. Scherer and Anson (2014) end their article in noting that that “college achievement and completion” (p. 4) is an outcome of using antiquated methodologies for modern academic concerns. However, the challenge they suggested was that a continuance of this would lead to “open door meaning that too many students today will encounter a closed door” (Scherer & Anson, 2014, p. 2).

### ***Federal Policy-Making Process***

Hannah (1996) outlined four areas elements that shape the way in which federal policy is created (a) organization of the process used to make decisions, (b) the individuals involved in the process, (c) the environment make-up to include the economic, social, and intellectual elements, (d) the “impact of the policy outcome” (p. 501). Understanding how these elements worked together in the process to creating federal policy helped in creating clarity in how a policy may be effective or ineffective.

The fragmented relationships between the varied levels of those elements that influence the policy-making process allows space for influence by multiple participants, mostly those of the surrounding environment (Hannah, 1996). The structural fragmentation of the relationships between those elements involved in the policy-making process “influences a highly relative and pluralistic decision-making system characterized by compromise, incrementalism and continual adjustment, yet subject to biases in one direction or the other” (Capt, 2013, p. 3).

In discussing the gaps of effectiveness in the HEA of 1965, Capt (2013) presented the incremental theory of decision making. Essentially, this theory described the way in which policymakers and stakeholders go about weighing variables in their creation of policy. Capt (2013) started by outlining three characteristics of incrementalism: (a) “the decision maker considers only some of the alternatives for dealing with the problem, and these will differ only incrementally from existing policies,” (b) there is limited scope in what is considered to be an issue of consequence that requires evaluation “(i.e. responses of the vocal middle-class to affordability of higher education)”, and (c) improvement of the present is at the forefront of the decision making “(i.e., politicians meeting the needs of middle-class political stakeholders)” (p. 8). In all, the use of incrementalism as a practiced framework for creating higher education policy negatively affected the ability for students to access colleges, both financially and choice. Open enrollment policy was a product of solution-based problem solving. Due to persistent access and race disparity in higher education, despite use of this policy in community and 4-year universities, it was fair to question in effectiveness of this policy in conjunction with university type.

## **Open Enrollment in Mississippi**

The same pressure fueled by the 1969 protests held in New York City to demand equal access to higher education, saw itself replicated to drive the revamping of enrollment/admission policies created by the BOT (1992) in response to requirements laid on the state by the federal government. First seen at the CUNY, the open admissions concept was heavily promoted in the 1960s and 1970s to reduce discrimination in college admissions and promote education of the underprivileged. While Mississippi universities did not have, by the state's definition, an open admissions policy, there was a system of fail safes and practices to include admissions, mobility between community colleges and 4-year institutions, academic remediation, and financial aid to ensure access to a state institution is possible. Even at its initial implementation, at CUNY, open admissions did not fully grant access to all students as there were restrictions associated with grade point average and requirements associated with standardized testing that limited which students got into where; therefore, state institutions within Mississippi may not subscribe to the terminology of being open enrollment institutions, the historical timeline of the creation of the increased access policy and affiliated practices in Mississippi presented as a descendent of the admissions methodology employed at the CUNY

Higher education policy in the state of Mississippi and its connection to expanding access to underrepresented students can be dated back to the 1890 Separate Car Act passed in the state of Louisiana which required separate accommodations for Blacks and Whites on railroads, including separate railway cars. The concept of separate but equal was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court with the passage of *Plessy v. Ferguson* which supported the constitutionality of racial segregation. It was not until the 1954 ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* that 'separate but equal' deemed unconstitutional and a violation of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment (Wikipedia, 2018c).

While *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) created a the precedent that outlawed desegregation, there was nothing within the policy that addressed how systemic segregation in higher education would be overcome. In fact, it was not until the passage of the Civil Rights act of 1964 that this conversation surrounding the desegregation of colleges and universities began (Lee, 2010).

Therefore, the combination of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the Civil Rights Movement increased the pressure on states such as Mississippi to desegregate higher education. Even though pledges such as the Southern Manifesto were created by congressman to fight against education desegregation (Wikipedia, 2019), no formal legislation was created that explicitly weakened the power of the 1954 ruling. However, it was noteworthy to mention that despite this legislation there were 19 states that continued segregated postsecondary education meaning that admittance into predominately white institutions was nearly impossible for non-White students (Lee, 2010). Brown (2001) states that there has been no federal or state legislation regarding desegregation. Therefore, the ambiguity provided space for states to create their own methods to address how to ‘open’ admission of predominately white institutions to non-White students.

### ***United States v. Fordice***

Twenty-one years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, Mississippi had not been designated as a desegregated state, hence the 1975 case of *Ayers vs. Allain*. Jake Ayers, Sr. on behalf of his son and 21 other students, sued the state of Mississippi. They argued that Mississippi “maintained a segregated higher education system and funded historically Black colleges at lower levels than the state’s five predominately white institutions” (Gehring, 2001). This case was dismissed by U.S. District Court Judge, Neal Biggers. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court “under the allegation that the state of Mississippi had failed to dismantle the

*de jure* system of segregation in higher education” (Lee, p. 168, 2010). The charge in the case of *United States v. Fordice* (1992) was that Mississippi was violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution (Lee, 2010). This United States Supreme Court case represents the most recent ruling directed towards states that have “historically maintained racially segregated systems of higher education” (Lee, 2010, p. 168). The *U.S. v. Fordice* case found that “Mississippi had not sufficiently integrated the state and must take affirmative action to change this under the Equal Protection Clause” (*United States v. Fordice*, 1992).

The ruling on *U.S. v. Fordice* was passed in 1992; however, the case was initiated in 1975 and it was not litigated until 1987 in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Mississippi (Performance Evaluation and Evaluation Expenditure Review, [PEER], 2009). During the litigation, the state of Mississippi made the argument that it was in compliance with the laws that required the elimination of separated education. Additionally, the State asserted that any segregation that persisted to affect the make-up of the universities was a factor of “student choice” (Lee, 2010). To support its argument, the state of Mississippi cited cases *Bazemore v. Friday* (1986) and *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) where students choose “totally unfettered” the institution of their choosing. Therefore, the *Ayers v. Allain* (1990) ended with the District Court ruled in favor of Mississippi citing that the state had done what was required to end lawful segregation in higher education. This decision was appealed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit; however, the ruling was upheld (*Ayers v. Mabus*, 1991). The initial ruling was ultimately overturned in *U.S. v. Fordice* (1992) on the basis that the Fifth Circuit Court had “used the proper standard for determining whether the discriminatory effects of the *de jure* system of segregation had been eradicated” (Lee, 2010, p. 168). Additionally, the

Supreme Court questioned the argument that students were segregated to the universities by choice. They noted that “choice” is only applicable if the state was not nurturing a system that promoted segregation to influence the “choice of the student. Justice White wrote the following pertaining to the state’s role in desegregation:

If the state perpetuates policies and practices traceable to its prior system that continue to have segregative effects—whether by influencing student enrollment decisions or by fostering segregation in other facets of the university system—and such policies are without sound educational justification and can be practicably eliminated, the state has not satisfied its burden of proving that it has dismantled its prior system. Such systems run afoul of the Equal Protection Clause, even though the state has abolished the legal requirement that Blacks and Whites be educated separately and has established racially neutral policies not animated by discriminatory purpose. (Fordice, 1992, p. 2737)

Beyond the ruling, there were four policies that were identified that affected Mississippi higher education seen to be a continuance of lawful segregation: (1) admissions policies that left road blocks insurmountable by Blacks to attend predominately White institutions, (2) the mission of the PWIs where designated in such a way that they received more resources than historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) based on the fact that PWIs were classified to be able to offer more degrees and programs than HBCUs, (3) there was significant financial effort by the state to maintain racially identifiable universities, and (4) there was challenged presented by the Supreme Court regarding duplicate programs being offered by PWIs and HBCUs that were closely located to each other (Lee, 2010). An official ruling for *U.S. v. Fordice* was not officially given until 1995, and it is within this ruling that Mississippi was required to create admissions policies that were the same for all eight state institutions in order to “ensure racial

diversity at each of the universities in the state university system” (PEER, 2009). While the ruling of *United States v. Fordice* (1992) created a new period of policies that affected postsecondary desegregation, the court case failed to specify how states should proceed in addressing this requirement.

### ***Open Enrollment as a Tool of Equality***

“In the past, advocates of racial justice knew who their enemies were. Public figures claim to be a friend to ‘diversity,’ but how they vote on policy issues may actually boil down to one thing, racist tendencies” (Smith, 1995, p. 298). Prior to the ruling found in the *U.S v. Fordice* case, standardized test scores were a key piece in the perpetuation of segregation within the Mississippi’s colleges and Universities. Astin (2017) asserts that when standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, that are first generation, and Black or Hispanic are at a competitive disadvantage. He goes on to mention that if universities were equitable in their practices to provide opportunities and resources to all students, use of standardized scores and grade point averages would be a suitable tool for admission; however, this is not the case. Another limitation to the usage of these tests, according to Astin (2017) is that they narrowly cover the content by which universities claim to look for in students. “If you consult college mission statements to find out what student outcomes are most valued by institutions, you’re most likely to find qualities like leadership skills, social responsibility, creativity, and citizenship—none of which has relevance to what standardized tests measure” (Astin, 2017, p. 25). These assertions are evident in the *U.S. v. Fordice* case. “Although legal segregation of the university system ended in 1962, the court found that the state’s minimum ACT score requirement for entrance to its flagship universities was directly traceable to de jure segregation and perpetuated the segregation” (Mississippi Desegregation

Case, 2018). Therefore the U.S. Fordice in 1992 ruled that “state’s higher education system unconstitutionally segregated, the U.S. Supreme Court cited the use of test score cutoffs in denying African American students the opportunity to attend Mississippi’s traditionally White universities” (Open Admissions and Remedial Education at the CUNY, Task Force on the CUNY, 1999, p. 5). As required by the United States Supreme Court, the state of Mississippi had to implement a policy that would explicitly eradicate desegregation within the state institutions.

While not explicitly stated in the *Minutes* (BOT, 1992), it can be postulated that the BOT’s decision to create the following provisional admission standards are in response to the federal ruling:

Students who do not meet the above regular admission standards may be admitted to Mississippi public universities under provisional status. However, the number of students admitted under provisional status at each university during the academic year may not exceed the following percentage of the fall enrollment of first-time entering freshmen with less than twelve hours of coursework at that university. (p. 96)

Today some updates have been made to the policy to included specification for eligibility as set by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) standards and the opportunity to participate in a summer development program. According to the *Policies and Bylaws* (2017) of the BOT (2017):

Students who have not demonstrated adequate readiness in English or Reading or Mathematics will be granted Full Admission with Academic Deficiencies to the Summer Developmental Program. This is an intensive program that concentrates on high school subject areas (English, Reading, and Mathematics) that are applicable to

success in first-year college courses. These courses carry institutional credit.\*

Students who successfully complete the summer program, by passing the developmental courses that they are determined to be deficient and the Learning Skills Laboratory courses, will receive admission to the fall term with mandatory participation in the Year-Long Academic Support Program or some other Institutions of Higher Learning recognized intervention strategy to promote success in the courses in which they are not fully prepared, according to ACT subtest scores. Students who fail to successfully complete the Summer Developmental Program are not eligible for enrollment in the regular academic year and will be counseled to explore other postsecondary opportunities, including those offered by community colleges. (p. 96)

Upon review the varied perspectives and limited research revolving around methods of college admissions, student accessibility to higher education, and perpetuated disparity, there is need to trouble the interplay between these concepts in order to effectiveness of the college environment. In alignment with the research presented thus far, one way to begin this process is by looking at higher education systems that use open enrollment as a form of college admissions. A thorough review of legislation impacting higher education reveals a series of court rulings, policies and guidelines that have yet to clearly define the way in which America's higher education system should proceed in creating equitable access pathways.

Knowing that open enrollment is a product of these wholly ineffective pieces of legislation there is concern as to whether or not using it as an admission tool will lead to creating actualized equity. More importantly, understanding that open enrollment was created for a community/junior college institution, the experiences of students admitted to 4-year institutions under this model bears address.

## Summary

Rulings the of Supreme Court rulings are powerful. They greatly affect the dynamic of higher education “as it has the potential to balloon from a specific case to changing interpretation and application of equity and equality for all” (Caldwell et al., 2007, p. 17). As such, the impetus for open enrollment policies and practices emerged from history of access-oriented policies. The second Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890 expanded higher education by providing federal funding for states to increase programs that focused on disciplines and vocations such as agriculture and engineering (Thelin, 2011). Additional changes related to diversity in and access to higher education occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (1954) and had passage of the HEA of 1965, both of which called for equal access to higher education. The HEA of 1965 pushed further, leading to the creation of federal financial aid programs, increased state funding for higher education, and increased institutional funding for research and development, which led to the expansion of institutions and their enrollments (Lavin, 2000). These pieces of legislation provided mandatory impetus for institutions to change how they were admitting underrepresented populations. The HEA of 1965 provided a means for extended access to higher education; however, like *Brown v. Board Education*, this policy fell short in creating actualized equity. While well intended, policy is not always implemented effectively, and these policies did not necessarily address other barriers like the racism and segregation that permeates the culture of higher education (Patton, 2016).

The creation of open-enrollment admission policies was intended to reduce barriers and increase diversity in higher education institutions. Specifically, Hyllegard and Lavin (1992) state that “open access policies were designed to increase educational opportunity for economically and educationally disadvantaged minority students, principally Black and Hispanic students who

otherwise would have no chance for college” (p. 240). The structural fragmentation of the relationships between those elements involved in the policy-making process “influences a highly relative and pluralistic decision-making system characterized by compromise, incrementalism and continual adjustment, yet subject to biases in one direction or the other” (Capt, 2013, p. 7). To fully understand the sociopolitical concerns that preceded the creation of the open enrollment policies, it is important to take a deep dive into federal and state legislation that both directly and indirectly impacted higher education.

Open enrollment practices are used by many American higher education institutions (Hyllegard & Lavin, 1992). However, these open-access and similarly named policies are often the by-product societal pressures on federal and state legislators. Therefore, examining practice regarding policy is necessary, to prevent the replication or extension of oppressive discourses.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Socio-Diagnostic Critique of Open Enrollment as an Admission Process**

##### **Literature Overview**

The impetus for open enrollment policies and practices emerged from a history of access-oriented policies. The second Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890 expanded higher education by providing federal funding for states to increase programs focused on disciplines and vocations such as agriculture and engineering (Thelin, 2011). Additional changes related to diversity in and access to higher education occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, following the *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954 decision and passage of the HEA of 1965 (hereafter HEA of 1965), both of which called for equal access to higher education. The HEA of 1965 pushed further to create federal financial aid programs, increase state funding for higher education, and increase institutional funding for research and development, which led to the expansion of institutions and their enrollments (Lavin, 2000). Both *Brown* and HEA of 1965 provided mandatory impetus for institutions to promote admission of underrepresented populations.

The HEA of 1965 provided extended access to higher education; however, like *Brown*, this policy fell short in creating actualized equity. In both the HEA of 1965 and *Brown*, student choice was lost due to failure to address systemic education disparities. The HEA of 1965 increased access to financial aid and mandated federal jurisdiction over universities that receive federal funding. The HEA of 1965 addressed some financial access concerns but did not focus on

student choice. Brown ruled that “separate but equal” was unconstitutional but did not specify how states should implement desegregation. In states like Mississippi, Black students were given access to higher education via (HBCUs), but Black students still met numerous roadblocks enrolling at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). While Brown and HEA of 1965 might have been well-intentioned, neither specifically addressed barriers like the racism that permeates the culture of higher education (Patton, 2016).

There was need for a socio-diagnostic critique. Open-enrollment admission policies were intended to reduce barriers and increase diversity in higher education institutions. Hyllegard and Lavin (1992) explained, “open access policies were designed to increase educational opportunity for economically and educationally disadvantaged minority students, principally Black and Hispanic students who otherwise would have no chance for college” (p. 240). Lavin (2000) conducted a review of the CUNY open access policy and noted four distinctive areas where the open-enrollment policy showed to be a mechanism for access to higher education for traditionally marginalized populations: (1) marked increase in overall student attendance, specifically the freshman class; (2) increased enrollment of Black and Hispanic students; (3) widened pathways to the baccalaureate; and (4) three-fourths of Blacks and Hispanics would not have qualified for admittance. While Lavin explored open enrollment as a mechanism for access, he did not address the systemic issues that led to the need for open enrollment admission practices. Hannah (1996) outlined four elements that shape how federal policy is created: (a) organization of the process used to make decisions; (b) the individuals involved in the process; (c) the environment make-up to include the economic, social, and intellectual elements; and (d) the “impact of the policy outcome” (p. 501). Understanding how these elements work together in the process of creating federal policy helps create clarity in how a policy may be effective or

ineffective. The structural fragmentation of the relationships between those elements involved in the policy-making process “influences a highly relative and pluralistic decision-making system characterized by compromise, incrementalism and continual adjustment, yet subject to biases in one direction or the other” (Jones as cited in Hannah, 1996, p. 501).

To fully understand the sociopolitical concerns that preceded the creation of the open enrollment policies, it is important to take a deep dive into federal and state legislation that both directly and indirectly impacted higher education. Understanding phenomena “discourse is not simply an isolated textual or dialogic structure. Rather it is a complex communicative event that also embodies a social context, featuring participants (and their properties) as well as production and reception processes” (Sheyholislami, 2001, p. 3). To understand the impact of policy and practiced implementation, understanding the context in which a policy or practice was created provides a more holistic picture that leads to a more sustainable method to address the issue at hand. Critical discourse analyses provide frameworks to approach research in this way.

Fairclough (1993) defined critical discourse analysis as:

discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony. (p. 135)

### ***Examining Current Practices to Guide Future Work***

Open enrollment practices have been successfully taken up many American higher education institutions (Hyllegard & Lavin, 1992). Open-access and similarly named policies and

practices are often the by-product societal pressures on federal and state legislators. However, as Gildersleeve et al. (2010) noted, the unquestioned acceptance of public agenda for higher education without critical investigation is the crux of many operational issues faced today. Simply stated, education policymaking does not always lead to sustainable progress (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Even in instances where access progress has occurred, that progress may not be sustainable and other challenges may emerge. For example, discourses that frame open enrollment practices as diversity efforts run this risk of 1) unfairly depicting/casting the beneficiaries of open enrollment, and 2) evoking the negative connotations associated with diversification in higher education. “These discourses construct images of people of color as outsiders, at-risk victims, commodities, and change agents” (Iverson, 2007, p. 586). In her findings, Iverson (2007) argued that “discursive representations (re)produce a subordination of people of color and re-inscribe a racially neutral conception of educational policies—even in policies that have as their focal point diversity in general and race in particular” (p. 593). Therefore, examining practice regarding policy is necessary, to prevent the replication or extension of oppressive discourses.

### **Problem Statement**

From the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1832 to the passing of Brown vs. Board of Education to the implementation of the HEA of 1965, federal and state policy affecting higher education have posited change regarding the proliferation of diversity and expansion of access (Thelin, 2011). There is an expanse of conditions that could inhibit the effectiveness of education policy implementation to include: “a lack of focus on the implementation processes when defining policies at the system level; a lack of recognition that the core of change processes required engaging people; and the fact that implementation processes need to be revised to adapt to new

complex governance systems” (Viennet and Pont, 2017, p. 6). Critical analysis of higher education policy and the associated implications of practice were necessary to ascertain problematic assumptions that may account for the continued educational gaps limiting equitable access to and through postsecondary education for systematically marginalized populations of students. By understanding how higher education policies impact diversity efforts and critically accessing the actual beneficiaries of these policies, policymakers and stakeholders can begin to address the true problems that cause inequity and disparities.

### **Objectives and Research Question**

I analyzed BOT policies related to enrollment and conducted a socio-diagnostic CDA on the implementation of admission policy at one public 4-year state institution in Mississippi to understand the overall impact of the policies’ implementation on the student experience. The questions that guided my study were:

1. How are state enrollment mandates enacted at case study institution?
2. How are open enrollment practices implemented by practitioners?
3. How do their practices contribute to or interrupt inequalities that they were meant to address?

Below, I introduced the theoretical and methodological approaches that informed and guided this study.

### **Epistemological Orientation**

This study was rooted in a critical, post-structural epistemological stance. Critical perspectives entail questioning and calling to address hegemonic systems that disparage marginalized populations. Critical approaches are conceived with various invocations of power,

social hierarchy, and domination historically associated with the work of Karl Marx focused critiques of labor and capitalism (Crotty, 1998). For this study, I considered the racialized context of the U.S., rooted in a history of slavery, segregation and discrimination, ongoing racial and socioeconomic inequities. Following the work of critical race scholars, I posit that these inequalities persisted because these foundational issues have not been addressed (Bell, 1980). For example, the concept of interest convergence which “explains racial relations in the context of legal scholarship and asserts that social justice for people of color occurs when the interest ideas, and realities of both people of color and Whites converge” (Felder & Barker, 2013, p. 4), illustrates how liberation for people of color in the U.S. only come when it benefits White people or White political interests. This critical focused trained my attention on the ways that higher education policies and policy change have connections to socio-political issues related to race. Specifically, I sought to explore how policy open enrollment implementation happens, and how it has been shaped by socio-political context and those in powered positions.

Post-structuralism reflects a deconstruction of the systems that were troubled by critical work. Literary theory and schools of criticism (2019) discussed post-structuralism in this way:

This approach concerns itself with the ways and places where systems, frameworks, definitions, and certainties break down. Post-structuralism maintains that frameworks and systems, for example the structuralist systems explained in the Structuralist area, are merely fictitious constructs and that they cannot be trusted to develop meaning or to give order. In fact, the very act of seeking order or a singular Truth (with a capital T) is absurd because there exists no unified truth. Post-structuralism holds that there are many truths, that frameworks must bleed, and that structures must become unstable or decentered. Moreover, post-structuralism is also concerned with the power structures or hegemonies

and power and how these elements contribute to and/or maintain structures to enforce hierarchy. Therefore, post-structural theory carries implications far beyond literary criticism. (paras. 1-2)

Drawing on these perspectives, I used admission policies and process as the vehicle to question how university policies, in their implementation, converge and diverge from their espoused goals. Post-structural perspectives help to direct and refine my critical commitments, focusing not just on the goal of policies and practices, and but the structure of policies and the constitution of practices. As such, important to this study are the ways in which practitioners and scholars both create knowledge and subsequently create policy or procedure in connection with said knowledge. Per the tenets of post-structuralism, separation of knowledge creation and meaning making is inherently impossible. In keeping with this stance, I drew from Discourse Historical Analysis (DHA) to shape my inquiry.

### **Conceptual Framing**

Given the critical and post-structural focus on policies and their implementation, I decided to engage discursive forms of analysis as a part of this qualitative case study. To analyze discourse, it is helpful to have a conceptual understand of language. Language is a social system, and like any system, it operates with rules and regulations (Howell, 2013). The two gears of this system are the signifier (the word) and signified (the concept or idea) which are intentionally and unintentionally set through social contract, “Language trajectory is primarily concerned with language in abstraction, [while discourse trajectory focuses] its material significance within the world...” (Howell, 2013, p. 7). As discourse is a part of all areas of society, critical inquiry that engages normed ideological-discursive events extends the conversation on how people are oppressed and marginalized with the hope of ending perpetuated disparity (Ayers, 2005).

Language and social exchanges are used to generate policies, policies are constituted with and by language, and interpretation of language (in policies) is central to how they are understood and implemented. Engaging critical and post-structural perspectives invite attention to social and historical contexts within which policies are created, revised, and enacted, “Foucault tends toward discourse which considers language as a practical concern closely connected with the context in which it appears” (Howell, 2013, p. 7). As such I decided to apply historical approaches to discourse analysis.

### ***Discourse Historical Approach***

I drew from Discourse Historical Analysis, to develop a discourse historical approach to this qualitative case study. DHA is a unique approach to analysis of policy creation and implementation in that it focuses on language as it is used; therefore, discourse is seen as a social practice: discourse is action (Forchtner, 2011). DHA is a part of critical discourse studies (CDS) and adheres to the same characteristics of CDS. CDS is a group of approaches that address “discursive phenomena and structures” (Wrobouschek, 2009, p. 36). According to Foucault (1992), critique is an art in that the researcher is not governed by any certain way to approach the study which invites research to develop unique and problem-specific approaches to analysis. Theoretically, approaches within CDS, such as DHA, “relate to language and language practices and has to address specific relations of power as the starting point of its intervention” (Foucault, 1992, p. 38). While CDS uses critique of discourse to create discourse that positions systemically silenced, marginalized, and oppressed voices above systemically powered perspectives; it, in turn, creates a “meta-discourse that seeks to re-articulate and thereby transform certain relations of power [which] generates effects of power” (Foucault, 1992, p. 38). This highlights the emancipatory nature of CDS and DHA, as its “core orientation [is] interdisciplinary, [and a]

socially transformative force (Forchtner, 2011, p. 2). In connection with other forms of critical inquiry, DHA integrates text or discourse immanent critique, socio-diagnostic critique, future-related prospective critique (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016).

In their description of the discourse-historical approach, Reisigl and Wodak (2001) described these interconnected concepts:

1. *Text or discourse immanent critique* aims at discovering inconsistencies, contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas in the structures internal to the text or discourse.
  2. *Socio-diagnostic critique* is concerned with demystifying the — manifest or latent — (possibly persuasive or “manipulative”) character of discursive practices. Here, the analyst makes use of her or his background and contextual knowledge and embeds the discursive event in a wider frame of social and political relations, processes and circumstances. On this level, we also draw on social theories to interpret the discursive events. This indicates that the DHA is inherently interdisciplinary.
  3. *Prognostic critique* (for example, by developing guidelines against sexist language behavior or in order to reduce language barriers in hospitals, schools, and so forth).
- (p. 43)

DHA takes into consideration the historical implications leading to the existence of the policy or any social discourse. DHA is attentive to political concerns and aims to interweave as many kinds of discourse related to a particular issue as possible to include the historical aspects of that issue (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). Critically investigating the historical context of federal and state legislation will forward the discussion on higher education policy creation that yields practical application for developing inclusive admission practices.

DHA has been used in various contexts to study policy. van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) conducted a study that claims Austrian immigration personnel often deny family reunion applications for workers that are immigrants. They use a DHA in combination with other types of text analysis to investigate the intertextuality of systemic rejection of immigrant family reunification with other forms of discourse related to post-war immigration in Austria broadly (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) analyzed the notices that reject immigrants' applications to be reunited with their families and the associated rationale, and the laws that spoke to the broader context of immigration, and the discussions about family reunification in the media and the Parliament. They established that these denial letters are rationalized through "prejudiced judgement of the applicants' ability to 'integrate into Austrian society'" (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p. 83).

As institutions, colleges and universities are subject to centering hegemonic systems that benefit powerful voices. The discursivity of policy creation as it relates to the relationship between admission practice discourse and race-stimulated government intervention discourse requires critical inquiry to understand the overall impact on students. In alignment with the approach of van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999), I took into consideration the historical relationship between race and policy, specifically admission policy, and the discourses related to access to higher education generally. Drawing from DHA to develop my conceptual framing, I follow the assertion that a "multidisciplinary approach to achieve a multi-dimensional deconstruction of the way certain topoi and arguments are recontextualized and reformulated" (van Leeuwen & Wodak, p. 91).

**Critiques.** CDA operate from subjective perspectives as they take into consideration the existence of shared and constructed meanings that guide the ways society operates. As such for

all that these frameworks do to shed light on typically silenced perspectives, studies that use these theories are often questioned for their ‘validity’. Reisigl and Wodak (2016) noted DHA cannot be used with approaches that are theoretically incompatible, and the focus of the studies often can benefit from a more operationalized method of inquiry. While the probability of overcoming these critiques is slight, informing the reader about these limitations help in creating context.

### **Positionality**

In both my professional and personal life, I have seen visible differences in how I must engage the world and how the world engages me simply because I am both a woman and African American. Fatigue proliferated by micro aggressive comments and explicit bias saturate my life due to the intersections of my most salient identities. Awareness that my experience is the plight of many people operating from marginalized identities, I believe it is necessary to question hegemonic institutions and create experiences that shed light of the systematically silenced. Because disruption is often seen as a challenge to a normed or powered system, to operate from this perspective is to consistently create space for new ways of understanding for those that may question legitimacy or validity. However, my challenge is those engaging my work will see disruption to “resist and work against settled truths and oppositions” (Williams, 2005, p. 3).

### **Methodology and Methods**

I conducted a critical qualitative investigation of open enrollment policy implementation at a 4-year public university in the state of Mississippi in order to understand the overall impact of the policy’s implementation on the student experience. I used a discourse historical approach within a broader case study methodology to guide my collection and analysis of the data.

Case study was a fitting methodology to shape this study, providing a strategy for collecting rich, contextual data. Case study approaches are especially useful to gain contemporary perspectives on process within organizations (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) asserts that case study knowledge, “resonates with our own experience because it is more vivid, concrete, and sensory, than abstract” (p. 44). This aligned with the need for more rich information about the complex nature of policy implementation in higher education. Case study is also an effective tool to explore people’s experiences, given that “...our experiences are rooted in context” (Merriam, 2009, p. 45). “This type of research involves in-depth contextual study of a person, people, issue, and place within a predetermined scope of study” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 26). Overall, information generated can be used to support the efforts of practitioners at their respective institutions.

To better understand how open enrollment practices were enacted, it was necessary to get a rich and contextual understanding of the policies that have shaped open enrollment practices, and the ways administrators and practitioners enact open enrollment commitments. The case, identified for this study, was a 4-year public institution in Mississippi.

The institution I chose had a high percentage of Black students and Pell grant-eligible students; however, the institution had a low persistence and graduation rate for these groups of students relative to the number of students admitted to the university. My study investigated how state enrollment mandates were enacted at the case institution, how open enrollment practices were implemented by practitioners, and how those practices contribute to or interpret inequalities. Knowing the disparity between admitted students and their persistence and graduation rates, it was clear that there was a process issue. Therefore, looking at policy implementation at this institution would be illuminating. Moreover, there had not been an

intensive study of open enrollment at a 4-year public university as the implementation had only been intensely studied with community college systems or private institutions, neither of which has occurred within the past decade.

I engaged two data collection methods as I sought to answer the research question guiding this study, document collection and analysis and semi-structured individual interviews. My study engaged the socio-political context at the time the admission policy of the state of Mississippi was implemented. Therefore, collecting data from the meetings, legislative doctrine, etc. were essential to understanding the discursive nature of the admission policy creation and implementation. Bowen (2009) defines document analysis as a type of qualitative research where documents and other forms of written media are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning to a topic being investigated. Later those documents are analyzed by coding data into themes that align with information gathered from interviews and/or focus groups (Bowen, 2009). Semi-structured interviews served to fill in the gaps of information that may be unclear or missing from only collecting data from document analysis. A semi-structured interview is a form of research data collection that utilizes both a pre-determined set of open questions, which elicit discussion. This conversational interview process creates the opportunity for the interviewer to explore particular themes or responses further (Barclay, 2018).

Combined, document analysis and semi-structured interviews provided a holistic view of the socio-political context at the time of the admission policy being created, gave clarity as to the dissonance in the implementation of state's admission policy, and how practitioners interpret policy for inform their practice. These data, therefore, addressed directly the research questions that informed my study.

This data collection approach also contributed to the rigor of this case study and acted as a kind of triangulation. Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) used the principle of triangulation to examine the relationships between “discursive practices and extra-linguistic social structures” (p. 92).

### **Analytical Process**

I structured my analytic process in DHA, which took into consideration the historical implications leading to the existence of the policy or any social discourse. DHA is attentive to political concerns and aims to interweave as many kinds of discourse related to an issue as possible to include the historical aspects of that issue (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). Analysis of documents that described the admission process of the case institution was completed via a process of finding, selecting, appraising/making sense of, and synthesizing data. My analytical process included two phases. Phase I consisted of document analysis and led to the creation of codes through inductive coding. During the document analysis of the seven documents, I did an overview of the documents and made notes and created first-round codes. During the second round of document analysis, I created a question protocol to guide the review of the documents (see Appendix A). These questions were used to guide my review of each document and notes were taken in an analytic memo. The second round of document analysis was an open coding process and yielded several codes as noted in Table 4. Two rounds of document analysis and review of analytic memo notes yielded three emergent findings: consistency, lack of historical context, and multiple models of enrollment. These themes were used to assist in structuring the questions for the semi-structured interviews.

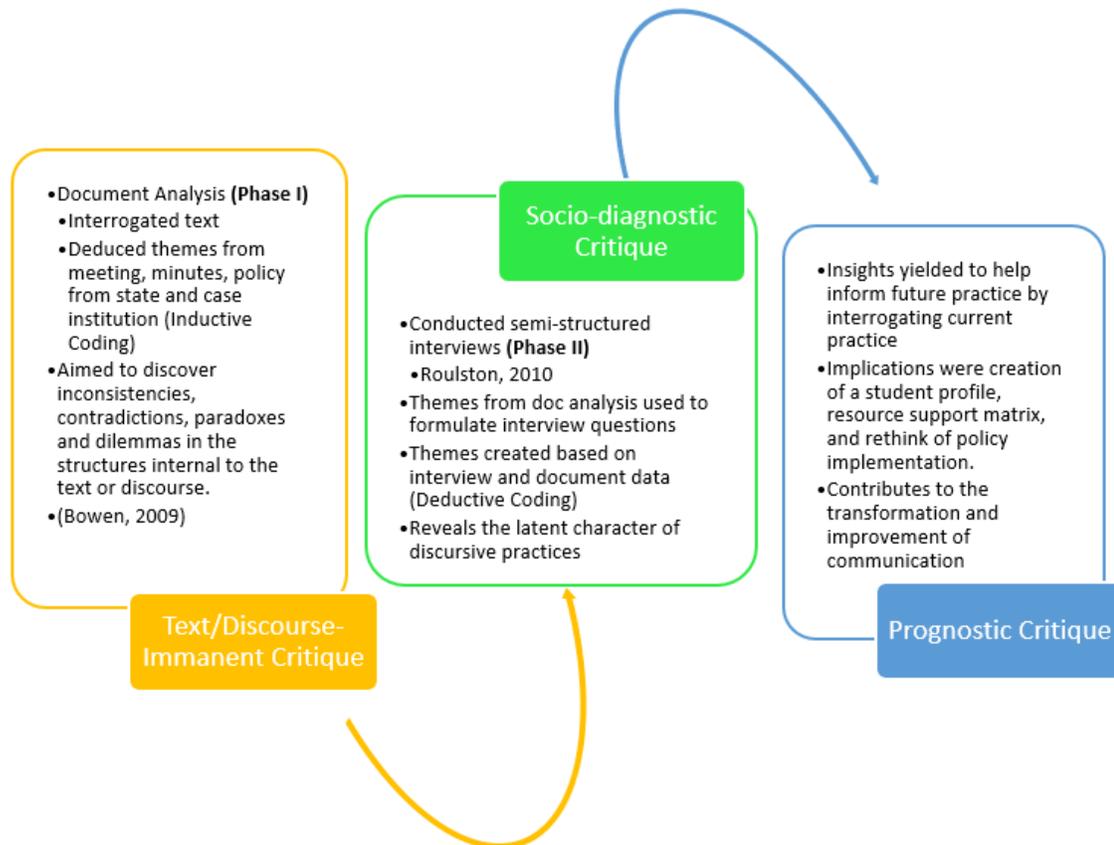
Phase II of the analytical process included the review of seven semi-structured interviews that provided detailed and varied accounts of practitioners’ interpretation of admission policy as

well as how they moved forward in structuring the support network for students. Using deductive coding the interview data were transcribed and coded based on the emergent themes found via the document analysis phase. Previously, the interview questions had been grouped according to the emergent themes: consistency, lack of historical context and multiple models of enrollment (see Appendix B). Each interviewee's responses were then reviewed, and memo notes were made all while looking for points of divergence and similarities of responses regarding questions.

Using focused/selective coding, the combination of these two forms of data (i.e., documents and interviews) provided context for both policy (documents) and practice (interviews) and yielding a final set of major themes or findings: open enrollment, but not really and lack of context=lack of student support matrix. To report these data in a way that proved effective in highlighting the findings through the lens of DHA, I relied on the structure used in Graham et al. (2004). In their article, "A call to arms at the end of history: A discourse-historical analysis of George W. Bush's Declaration of War on Terror", Graham et al. (2004) found four themes through their data analysis and expounded on those themes using varied forms of discourse within differing historical context. Similarly, I developed an argument for my themes utilizing text and interview discourse to not only understand impact on access into college, but also the impact of admission policies on the work of practitioners at universities using open admission or open enrollment practices. This process is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

*Data Collection and Analytical Structure*



*Note.* A detailed the process for utilizing text and interview discourse to not only understand impact on access into college, but also the impact of admission policies on the work of practitioners at universities using open admission or open enrollment practices.

***Discourse-Historical Analysis***

To structure my analysis, I used components of DHA. Address of the historical aspects of discursive acts were investigated through DHA (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). The first step was to integrate all obtainable information on the “historical background and the original sources in which discursive events are embedded” (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p. 91). Therefore, I conducted a document analysis of *Minutes* (BOT, 1992) documented by the BOT

The second step was to address the historical dimensions of discursive acts is to investigate the ways certain types of discourse are subject to diachronic change (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). Therefore, I made the decision to do a document analysis of the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017) as well as the university's admission and related policy. However, change in meaning is also shaped by spoken language. In as much, for me to gain a holistic view of the impact of admission policy on how practitioners perform their work, I felt it was necessary for me to conduct semi-structured interviews as well. Each method of data collection is distantly discursive and serves to create a holistic picture surrounding the historical context and meaning making associated with the creation and implementation of policy that uses open enrollment practices.

## **Phase I**

In the first phase of the study, I began with document analysis to better understand the written admission process at the case study site, informed by Bowen's (2009) process of finding, selecting, appraising/making sense of, and synthesizing data. Documents provided background context, additional questions to be asked, supplementary data, a means of tracking change and development, and verification of findings from other data sources (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis was particularly applicable to qualitative case studies -intensive studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organization, or program (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994).

### ***Finding Documents***

This study was a critical analysis of the impact of open enrollment policies and practices. As such I used document analysis as an opportunity to discover the intricacies of these policies as well as their creation. The first step of the document analysis process is *finding* the documents.

As document analysis is meant fill in the gaps or supplement the information presented in a literature review (Bowen, 2009), I used my literature to inform where I should begin in looking for documents. From here there was somewhat of a cascading effect. As an example, one of the first documents I reviewed was the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017). While reviewing this document, there were references to BOT minutes, which I later reviewed.

Because analyzing education policy must include an analysis of text describing or referencing the policy (Saraisky, 2016), I included documents such as meeting minutes from the BOT meeting where some of the admission policies were discussed and adopted. As a university administrator, I knew that the University was one of eight state institutions governed by the BOT. According to the BOT (2017), the BOT had the authority to establish the minimum requirements for its universities' admission. This authority extends to determining which requirements are to be uniform across all institutions and which have more flexibility in accordance with the final determination of the BOT (BOT, 2017).

I went on the BOT's website to find any documents related to operating procedures. What I found was the BOT *Policies and Bylaws* (2017). After reading this document, I found that section 600, Student Affairs and Admissions section, detailed the policies regarding admission standards and requirements. The sections that detailed full admissions, APVD, and year-long academic support listed the month and year of the corresponding BOT minutes: full admissions (9/93; 1/98; 3/2019); APVD (5/92; 9/93; 9/94; 3/95; 10/95; 9/96; 1/98; 2/2005; 8/2006; 2/2009; 3/2010; 05/2015; 05/2016), and yearlong academic support (5/92; 9/93; 9/94; 3/95; 10/95; 9/96; 1/98; 2/2005; 8/2006; 2/2009; 3/2010). From this list of dates, I did an internet search for the BOT's meeting minutes.

After collecting documents that dictated, from a state level, how admission processes should be conducted, I found it necessary to collect documents that detailed the process being followed on a university level. I came to this decision because in the Policy and Bylaws document, there is verbiage that gives universities the administrative flexibility in making admissions decisions based on the determination that anticipated enrollment will exceed the institution's capacity to adequately serve all prospective students who are otherwise qualified for admission, then the institution may make appropriate admissions decisions from among the pool of otherwise qualified non-resident applicants in light of institutional capacity and consistent with constitutional and other legal requirements, as well as in light of the BOT and the admitting institution's values, mission, and goals (BOT, 2017). If the university had the ability to detour from the specified guidelines of the BOT, I wanted to look at how the case university was interpreting and implementing the admission process.

Starting with the Office of Admission, I searched pages that detailed the requirements for admission. What I found were a series of interconnected website pages that detailed the process, options, and requirements for admission. The Undergraduate Catalog (2019) had information on recruiting, freshman regular admission. A few pages on the Summer Development Program and related policies were found the purpose as well for Accuplacer Test. From the list of documents that I found, I selected documents that I was able to find via various search engines and university library repositories.

Table 2

*List of Documents Identified, Selected, and/or Analyzed for Document Analysis*

<b>Documents</b>	<b>Found/Identified</b>	<b>Selected</b>	<b>Analyzed</b>
<b>BOT Minutes</b>			
Full Admission: 9/93	X	---	---
Full Admission: 1/98	X	X	---
Full Admission: 3/2019	X	---	---
Academic Placement resulting from Various Deficiencies: 5/92	X	X	X
Academic Placement resulting from Various Deficiencies: 9/93	X	---	---
Academic Placement resulting from Various Deficiencies: 9/94	X	---	---
Academic Placement resulting from Various Deficiencies: 3/95	X	---	---
Academic Placement resulting from Various Deficiencies: 10/95	X	---	---
Academic Placement resulting from Various Deficiencies: 9/96	X	---	---
Academic Placement resulting from Various Deficiencies: 1/98	X	X	---
Academic Placement resulting from Various Deficiencies: 2/2005	X	X	---
Academic Placement resulting from Various Deficiencies: 8/2006	X	---	---
Academic Placement resulting from Various Deficiencies: 2/2009	X	---	---
Academic Placement resulting from Various Deficiencies: 3/2010	X	---	---
Academic Placement resulting from Various Deficiencies: 05/2015	X	---	---
Academic Placement resulting from Various Deficiencies: 05/2016	X	---	---
Year Long Academic Support: 5/92	X	X	---
Year Long Academic Support: 9/93	X	---	---
Year Long Academic Support: 9/94	X	---	---
Year Long Academic Support: 3/95	X	---	---
Year Long Academic Support: 10/95	X	X	---
Year Long Academic Support: 9/96	X	---	---
Year Long Academic Support: 1/98	X	X	---
Year Long Academic Support: 2/2005	X	X	---
Year Long Academic Support: 8/2006	X	---	---

Table 2 (continued)

<b>Documents</b>	<b>Found/Identified</b>	<b>Selected</b>	<b>Analyzed</b>
<b>BOT Minutes</b>			
Year Long Academic Support: 2/2009	X	---	---
Year Long Academic Support: 3/2010	X	---	---
<b>Undergraduate Catalog (2019)</b>			
Applications	X	---	---
Legal residence status	X	---	---
Tuition and fees	X	---	---
Student account management	X	---	---
Financial aid	X	---	---
College and degree programs	X	---	---
Academic opportunities	X	---	---
Student life	X	---	---
Home page	X	X	X
Introduction	X	X	X
Recruiting	X	X	X
Entrance Requirements	X	X	X
General Education requirements	X	X	X
<b>Policies and Bylaws (2017)</b>			
Section 600 (601-618)	X	X	X
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>

### *Selecting Documents*

All the found documents were initially reviewed with the questions from Table 3. I describe these as memo questions. Per the initial review, using the memo questions, I found that some documents contained redundant information, or information that would not be useful for my study. Therefore, after the initial review of documents, I was able to select the documents I would use as part of my analysis. These documents were noted in the second column of Table 2. As an example, I only analyzed the *Minutes* (BOT, 1992), even though I found multiple sets of minutes. May 1992 was the first time the policy which I was studying, APVD, appeared in the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017). As the other minutes I found did not provide additional insight into why or how APVD came about, I felt it was not necessary to fully analyze those

minutes. This part of the process included first scanning over the documents, next I did a more thorough read through of the documents (Bowen, 2009).

**BOT Policies and Bylaws.** This document provided a thorough outline of the roles, oversight, and policies provided by the BOT (2017). The main section that I used was Section 600 as it details student affairs and admission policies. From the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017), there were 18 sets of meeting minutes that pertained to admission policy. However, I was able to obtain minutes from May 1992, October 1995, January 1998, September 2005, and February 2007. I decided to only use the minutes from May 1992, as these minutes provided the initial description of the APVD admission process.

**BOT Meeting Minutes.** The BOT collect their meeting minutes via a website that can be accessed by the public. The meeting minutes detail the voting and give insight into the conversations that led to Mississippi state institutions using this type of admission policy.

**Undergraduate Catalog.** The home page of the website provided a brief overview of the university. It highlighted its public, land-grant status. and stated that the university is committed to its tradition of instilling among its students the ideals of diversity citizenship, leadership, and service. The introduction page provided a broad overview of the case institution i.e. location, institution type (comprehensive, doctoral degree granting, land-grant university), accrediting board, academic units, centers and institutes, amount of land (4200 acres, amount of money invested in buildings and grounds (~\$1 billion). Further it timelines the institutions beginnings under the Morrill Land- grant act of 1862. It further details how other federal legislation provided funding to extend the mission of the College: in 1914, the Smith-Lever Act called for instruction in practical agriculture and home economics to persons not attendant or resident, thus creating the state-wide effort which led to Extension offices in every county in the

State; and, in 1917, the Smith-Hughes Act provided for the training of teachers in vocational education. This document lists the university presidents, vision and mission statements, president's cabinet/officers of the university, academic deans, and BOT's members. The recruiting page detailed the roles of university recruitment counselors. They visit high schools and community colleges, and inform students about admission processes, financial aid, scholarship, housing, and ways to get involved. Additionally, they discuss the requirement for orientation attendance as well as what is accomplished at orientation.

The entrance requirements for the freshmen section laid out the admission process. It details 'regular admission', 'admission with deficiencies', 'home schooled', 'special program for academically talented students', and 'admission by examination'. There were lines of delineation between how MS residents are admitted versus out-of-state students. Additionally, there is a qualifier based if a student athlete satisfies the requirements for NCAA standards. There are no specifics regarding points of contact outside of the Office of Admissions and Scholarships. This department appears to be the only one mentioned via this entire webpage.

Lastly, the general education requirements section outlined course descriptions for general education classes for prerequisites and/or grade requirements. This page pertains to requirements upon being admitted to the university. Essentially, once a student leaves the institution, the requirements, at minimum should be obtained:

Baccalaureate-seeking students should demonstrate the following general education competencies:

- Students will write clearly and effectively

- Students will understand the formal elements of the fine art(s), and develop an awareness of both the values and functions of works within their historical and/or social contexts.
- Students will understand the diverse dimensions of human culture.
- Students will understand and use the basic approaches and applications of mathematics and statistics for analysis and problem solving.
- Students will apply science to natural systems and understand its impact on society.
- Students will understand and appreciate human behavior and social structures, processes, and institutions (Undergraduate Catalog, 2019)

The catalog included quite a bit of information; therefore, it should be noted that I do not discuss the following sections of the online undergraduate catalog: applications, legal residence status, tuition and fees, student account management, financial aid, college and degree programs, [academic opportunities, and student life]-these last two had short paragraphs with no points of contact listed.

### ***Appraising Documents***

In appraising the documents found, the next step was to analyze each document to determine their relevance to the research study, completeness, if the documents fit the conceptual framework of the study, determine the original purpose of the documents, the documents' author(s), and if the document is firsthand or secondhand knowledge (Bowen, 2009). Before moving to the second phase of analysis, the initial review of the documents had to be analyzed based upon their alignment with these six analytical characteristics. Table 3 detailed the memo

questions that were created to determine each document’s fit. Table 2 detailed which documents were found, selected then analyzed. Those documents marked as “analyzed” are the documents I used for the full document analysis in this study.

Table 3

*List of Memo Questions*

Memo Questions
What do I think I will learn from this document?
With which part(s) of my research question does this document most align? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What are open enrollment practices?</li> <li>b. How are open enrollment practices implemented by practitioners?</li> </ul>
What did I actually learn from this document?

Again, Bowen (2009) made it clear that the researcher should determine the relevance of the document regarding the study. Additionally, “documents [should] be assessed for completeness, in the sense of being comprehensive or selective. The researcher should determine, too, whether the documents are even (balanced) or uneven (containing great detail on some aspects of the subject and little or nothing on other aspects)” (p. 33). Additionally, consideration of the initial purpose of the document is important information. Teasing out the author or authors of the documents, whether the document is first or secondhand data, “whether it was solicited or unsolicited, edited or unedited, anonymous or signed, etc.” (Bowen, 2009, p. 33) are a part of determine documents’ origins. Table 4 shows the questions I used to complete

the document analysis. This protocol has more detailed questions than the memo to have a more thorough review.

The *analysis* phase of document analysis ties cleanly into the *finding* phase of document analysis. I found documents I wanted to review by reading the information I found for my literature review, then selected documents based on my ability to find them using varied search mechanisms. Then I analyzed a set of the selected documents based on their alignment with the six characteristics outlined by Bowen (2009). Using inductive coding, I completed an analytic memo on each of the selected documents, I was able to determine each document's usefulness toward the purpose of the study. After creating the document analysis protocol to guide my review of the documents, I made sense of the data in the documents. In my document analysis protocol, I answered questions (Table 4) for each of the documents I decided to analyze.

Table 4

*Document Analysis Protocol*

<b>Analysis Questions</b>
What did I actually learn from this document?
Who created this document?
Why was this document created?
What purpose does this document serve? a. State purpose? b. Institution purpose?

Table 4 (continued)

<b>Analysis Questions</b>
How was this document presented? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. i.e. guidelines vs. practice vs. law</li> <li>b. b. i.e. format: print? Electronic? Both electronic format.</li> </ul>
Describe the accessibility of this document <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What are implications for level and type of accessibility?</li> </ul>
What depts./ personnel are stated to be in charge of document content?
What depts./personnel may be in charge of document content?
How does this document connect to open enrollment?
Does this document define/reflect open enrollment?
How does the document explain its use and implementation process (if applicable)?

***Synthesizing Data***

Successful document analysis includes skimming, thoroughly reading and interpreting (Bowen, 2009). This process is repetitive combined elements of content analysis and thematic analysis.

According to Bowen (2009), document analysis does not require the convention of large amounts of media to be collected. While the quantity of documents specific to a topic area can

create a clearer picture, quantification is not necessary. As opposed to falling into that pattern, Bowen (2009) suggest a content analysis that uses a “first-pass document review in which meaningful and relevant passages of text or other data are identified” (p. 32). Content analysis includes arranging information into groupings related to the guiding questions of the research (Bowen, 2009).

For my second review of the documents, I used an open coding process and created codes in Dedoose that corresponded to the questions of my document analysis protocol. Table 4 details the analysis questions used during my second phase of document review. “Predefined codes may be used, especially if the document analysis is supplementary to other research methods employed [such as interviewing]” (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). As I did my second review of the documents via Dedoose, I made notes and highlighted excerpts to correspond with the initial codes I created. The list of initial codes was noted in Table 6. The second part of synthesizing the data, thematic analysis, was discussed in phase two.

## **Phase II**

Thematic analysis is a “form of pattern recognition within the data, with emerging themes becoming the categories for analysis,” (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). During the second review, I created an analytic memo. A review of this memo yielded themes from the document analysis. As the I reviewed the analytic memo, I noticed that there were gaps in the data provided by the document analysis. Recognizing these questions, themes emerged that led to the creation of interview protocol. The three emergent themes were: multiple models of enrollment (MME), consistency (CSY), and lack of historical context (LHC). This process of codes from the data leading to themes from a more thorough review of the data is method used frequently in document analysis. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane used the evaluation of their raw data to identify

key themes that portrayed the “phenomenon of performance feedback in the self-assessment of nursing practice in Australia” (as cited in Bowen, 2009, p. 32).

Using the emergent themes, I created an interview protocol to conduct semi-structured interviews (Appendix B). As the interviews were meant to be conversational between the researcher and respondent, another term for semi-structured interviews is constructivist interviews. I wanted to capture how higher education administration enact their practice within the scope of the admission policy in light of the insights from phase 1.

### ***Deductive Coding of Interview Data***

The interview protocol questions were sorted in alignment with the emergent themes: consistency, multiple modes of enrollment and lack of historical context. Using deductive coding, the responses from the seven interview transcripts were sorted in a word document to coincide with the emergent themes. After sorting and reviewing responses according to the emergent themes that initially created from the document analysis, connected, but different themes emerged. Through focused/selective coding, I deduced what would be the findings of the study.

### ***Constructivist Interviewing***

Semi-structured interviewing is an interaction process, wherein a researcher and participant engage in dialogue to in efforts to generate insight into a specific topic or experience (Unal, 2017). There are several important considerations when using an interviewing data collection method. According to Roulston (2010) these include:

1. What are the theoretical assumptions underlying this conception of interviewing?
2. What kinds of research questions are made possible from this perspective?

3. What methodological issues are highlighted in the literature in qualitative inquiry with respect to this conception?
4. What are criticisms of this conception of interviewing and/or research?
5. What kinds of approaches have researchers documented to establish the ‘quality’ of research using interviews from this conceptualization? (p. 204)

With these things in mind, I took a constructionist interview approach, which means the interview is a space where data are co-created by an interviewer and interviewee to interrogate the discourse surrounding ways of discussing the research topic (Silverman, 2001). Treating the interviews as “accounts” as opposed to “reports”, I explored the ‘sense making’ work through which participants engage in explaining, attributing, justifying, describing, and otherwise finding possible sense or orderliness in the various events, people, places, and courses of action they talk about” (Roulston, 2010, p. 218). The use of a semi structured interview allowed the respondent to verbalize his/her reality within the context of the topic discussed. More and more researchers are trending toward using a constructionist method in their interviews “and draw on analytic methods from ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, membership categorization analysis, discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and sociolinguistics (Roulston, 2010, p. 219).

### ***Sampling***

Because my goal was to investigate how open enrollment practices were enacted at a research university, it was imperative to talk with administrators and staff members about their experiences in this regard. Using a purposive sampling method, I selected administrators I wanted to interview. I did obtain IRB approval to conduct this study as noted in Appendix C. At the start of the interview, I read the consent agreement all participants granted consent to participate. Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research studies to intentionally identify

and select data sources that will provide “information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources” (Patton, 2002a). Determining which individuals or groups would be selected for the study was based on who could provide depth and understanding to the questions being asked based on knowledge or experience of the topic for the study (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Table 5 lists the administrators who were interviewees. These individuals worked at the case institution in positions that directly advised student groups, worked in admissions-oriented offices, or had job responsibilities focused on retention and/or academic success.

Table 5

*Interview Respondents and Area of Expertise*

Respondent Pseudonym	Area of Expertise
Interviewee 1	Student Recruitment/Admission
Interviewee 2	Student Recruitment/Admission
Interviewee 3	Retention/Academic Success
Interviewee 4	Retention/Academic Success; Student Advising
Interviewee 5	Student Recruitment/Admission
Interviewee 6	Retention/Academic Success
Interviewee 7	Retention/Academic Success; Student Advising

*Interview Approach*

Each of the interviewees participated in approximately 60-minute, semi-structured interview that were focused on gaining understanding of their role in the university, and their perspectives of how departmental and university operating policies, especially those directly related to open enrollment, influence their work. The interview protocol was constructed to gain understanding of participants’ role in the university, the type of impact they find themselves

making on students, and how departmental and university operating policies influence their work at the university. Question Examples:

1. Could you describe the processes for admitting students? (MME) (CSY) (LHC)
  - a. Who are the major decision makers?
  - b. What departments are central to this process?
2. How is your work impacted by students admitted with full admission i.e. initially meeting the university's minimum entrance requirements? (LHC)
3. How much/little are these students recruited?
4. How is work impacted by students admitted who do not initially meet the university's minimum entrance requirements? (MME) (CSY)

The interview protocol used to guide these interviews can be found in Appendix B.

### ***Evaluating the Evidence***

Accounting for rigor of the study and trustworthiness of the data collection process for my qualitative case study was approached using triangulation of data collection. Case studies as methodology have received criticism for lack of rigor and generalizability due to findings not being able to be generalized (Noor, 2008). However, the evaluation of the evidence produced by a case study is in whether there is a gained “holistic view of a certain phenomenon or series of events,” if emerging and inherent characteristics are observed in systems and institutions, and if generalizations can be drawn from review of data from multiple cases and replication is seen (Noor, 2008, p. 1603). By combining varied methods of gathering data, the study is strengthened and increases the validity of the study findings (Noor, 2008). In my study, I used document analysis, constructivist interviews, and discourse-historical analysis to arrive at the finding for my study.

Documents were great data sources; however, they should be analyzed critically. Data from documents should not be treated as “precise, accurate, or complete recordings of events that have occurred” (Bowen, 2009, p. 33) without determining what the documents mean and their influence on the topic being studied (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis creates guidelines for inquiry during the interview process while also cross validating the data gathered from the other forms of data collection (Noor, 2009). Discussing rigor and trustworthiness within the context of a study using a critical discourse analysis, it is important to center the foundational understanding that CDA asserts that practices, such as research methods, are inherently discursive and have philosophical implications that can “produce and maintain unequal power relations between groups of people” (Mullet, 2018, p. 119). Therefore, CDA studies do not purport that any strategy, methodology or order of research is ‘correct’. Rather, in its criticality, CDA “eliminates the use of narrow conversation analytic approaches” (Mullet, 2018). However, critical discourse analyses studies do show commonality in their targets of language usage in the context of “time, tense, modality, actors, and argumentation” (Mullet, 2018, p. 120). Therefore, researchers have had discussion around criteria for rigor and trustworthiness for critical discourse analyses. For most CDA approaches, rigor can be attained through “completeness (new data reveal no new findings) and accessibility (the work is readable by the social groups under investigation)” (Mullet, 2018, p. 120). Trustworthiness can be exhibited through triangulation of methodologies, theory, data sources, and/or participant checking (Mullet, 2018). Table 6 outlined the guidelines, as described in Mullet (2018), to outline the steps taken to display qualitative rigor in my study.

Table 6

*Steps Taken to Display Qualitative Rigor*

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Evidence of Rigor</b>	<b>My Study</b>
Reflexivity (Morrow, 2005)	Transparent view of whose reality is represented in the research	Self-reflective journal, peer debriefing, asking for clarification, member checking, focus groups.	Memos/notes were taken through three-step document analysis process and the interview process.
Subjectivity (Morrow, 2005)	Transparent view of researcher bias	Researcher's articulation of own positionality, monitoring of self, and rigorous subjectivity.	I state my positionality in chapter 2 of my study as well as to the participants of the interview in the Informed Consent form (Appendix C)
Adequacy of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)	Adequate evidence (completeness)	Data gathered to the point of redundancy; new data reveal no new findings.	I collected multiple years of BOT minutes; however, found after the initial phase of document analysis that information was redundant. Therefore, I was able to reduce the amount of documents analyzed in the second phase. I conducted 7 interviews from practitioners dealing with varying pieces of student success, admission, retention and persistence. There was no need to conduct further interviews after 7 due to information being consistent and repetitive.

Table 6 (continued)

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Evidence of Rigor</b>	<b>My Study</b>
	Adequate sample	Purposeful sampling strategy.	All documents selected pertained to the admission process created by Institutions of Higher Learning BOT and/or guidelines/policies  The participants selected to interview selected based upon their job descriptions, existing within different positions of admission, student success, retention, and persistence
	Adequate variety of data	Use of multiple data sources.	Table 2 details the sources used for data collection 7 semi-structured interviews were conducted
Adequacy of interpretation (Morrow, 2005)	Analytical framework	Clearly articulated analytical framework.	Detailed throughout the Conceptual/ Theoretical Framework section as well as in the analytical strategy, DHA is used
	Immersion in the data	Repeated forays into the data (e.g., repeated readings of transcripts).	Document analysis was done in three different phases. The themes deduced from document analysis led to the creation of the interview protocol.  Themes were then deduced from the interviews.

Table 6 (continued)

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Evidence of Rigor</b>	<b>My Study</b>
			Finally, in the last phase of analysis, I synthesize the themes from the previous two phases to create the project findings
Deviant case (Miles & Huberman, 1994)	Disconfirming evidence	Deliberate search for potentially disconfirming instances; comparisons of disconfirming with confirming instances.	There are multiple instances throughout my study both critique my position regarding the topic of my research (Critique of Open Enrollment) as well as critiquing the use of a CDA (Critique of Discourse- Historical Analysis)
Authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Seale, 1999)	Educative authenticity	Participant's understandings of others' constructions expand.	Both me, as the interviewer, and the participants participated in constructionist meaning making, the structure of the interviews as conversational allowed there to be a two-way street of information sharing and meaning making
	Catalytic authenticity	Action or change that redistributes power from the dominant to the disempowered.	Open enrollment practices are used by many American higher education institutions (Hyllegard & Lavin, 1992). However, these open-access and similarly named policies are often the by-product societal pressures on federal and state legislators.

Table 6 (continued)

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Evidence of Rigor</b>	<b>My Study</b>
			Therefore, examining practice regarding policy is necessary, to prevent the replication or extension of oppressive discourses.
	Fairness	Different constructions are represented.	I used multiple document sources as well as multiple interviewees.
Consequential validity (Patton, 2002b)	Social or political change	Increased consciousness; perspectives of those who are silenced or disempowered are amplified.	I critically analyzed the higher education open enrollment policy making process to ascertain problematic assumptions that may account for the continued educational gaps limiting equitable access and valuable experiences for systematically marginalized populations of students
Accessibility (Wodak & Meyer, 2009)	Audience for the research includes the participants	Findings are readable and comprehensible by the social groups under investigation.	This document was created to address practitioner and policy maker practice, as the documents used and interviews are from those individuals, these individuals should be able to digest the information presented.

Table 6 (continued)

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Evidence of Rigor</b>	<b>My Study</b>
Theoretical triangulation (Wodak & Meyer, 2009)	Four levels of context: Immediate language; Interdiscursive relations; Immediate social context; Broad social context	All four levels of context are represented and discussed in the analytical framework and the analysis.	I conducted a critical qualitative investigation of open enrollment policy implementation at a 4-year public university in the state of Mississippi in order to understand the overall impact of the policy's implementation the student experience. I used a case study methodology as a framework and the discourse-historical approach to guide my analysis of the data. As discourse is a part of all areas of society, critical inquiry that engages normed ideological-discursive events extends the conversation on how people are oppressed and marginalized with the hope of ending perpetuated disparity (Ayers, 2005).

To address the trustworthiness within my study, I conducted two primary methods of collecting data: document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Then I used discourse-historical analysis to construct the framework of my analysis. This was a triangulation of data sources and an analytical methodology. In my Analytical Process section, I go more into detail for this process.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### **Findings Overview**

In this chapter, I described the two phases of my analysis and the findings that emerged from completing a document analysis of seven documents and conducting seven semi-structured interviews that related to the university admission policy, APVD, and administrator practices regarding the implementation and support matrix associated with supporting students. I did a case study of one 4-year state institution in Mississippi. After collecting the data, I used discourse-historical analysis to shape the framework of my analyses. Lastly, it should be noted while the quotes and perspectives of all interviewees were used in the formation this study's findings, some quotes were not used to ensure anonymity on the interview participants.

#### **Phase I Data Analysis: Document Analysis**

Through combining the analysis notes of my first and second review, I recognized that the same questions and themes arose: my emergent findings. The emergent findings were multiple models of enrollment, consistency, and lack of historical context. Table 7 displayed the specific codes that combined to form the emergent findings. The emergent findings listed in Table 8 were linked to the codes synthesized from the document analysis process.

Table 7

*Phase I Data Analysis: Codes from Document Analysis*

List of Codes	
Departments/personnel in charge of document content: Specifically details the department or people that are over the implementation of what is stated in the document	Person/group created this document
Access	Policy implementation process (if applicable)
Accessibility of this document	Purpose of this document Subcodes: institution purpose, stated purpose (guideline vs. practices vs. law
Connections between documents	Unstated departments/personnel in charge
Defines/Reflects Open Enrollment	Year Long Academic Support
APVD Subcodes: creation, definitions, implementation	

Table 8

*Emergent Findings and Connected Codes*

Emergent Finding	Codes
Multiple Models of Enrollment (MME)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Access</li> <li>2. Defines/Reflects Open Enrollment</li> <li>3. APVD</li> </ol> Subcodes: creation, definitions, implementation <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Policy implementation process (if applicable)</li> <li>5. Year Long Academic Support</li> </ol>
Consistency (CSY)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Departments/personnel in charge of document content: Specifically details the department or people that are over the implementation of what is stated in the document</li> <li>2. Accessibility of this document</li> <li>3. Connections between documents</li> <li>4. Person/group created this document</li> <li>5. Unstated departments/personnel in charge</li> </ol>
Lack of Historical Context (LHC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Access</li> <li>2. APVD</li> </ol> Subcodes: creation, definitions, implementation <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Purpose of this document</li> </ol> Subcodes: institution purpose, stated purpose (guideline vs. practices vs. law)

### ***Multiple Models of Enrollment***

The BOT (2017) outlined the process for admission, requirements, and the different types of admission. Additionally, section 602 details freshman admission requirements for university system institutions. This section of the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017) details the types of admission processes to include full admission and academic placement resulting from deficiencies. Section 602 of the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017) will grant full admission to a student with the following metrics:

Full admission will be granted to the following grade point average scores:

1. All students completing the College Preparatory Curriculum (CPC) with a minimum of a 3.20 high school GPA on the CPC; or
2. All students completing the College Preparatory Curriculum (CPC) with (a) a minimum of a 2.50 high school GPA on the CPC or a class rank in the top 50%, and (b) a score of 16 or higher on the ACT; or
3. All students completing the College Preparatory Curriculum (CPC) with (a) a minimum of a 2.00 high school GPA on the CPC and (b) a score of 18 or higher on the ACT: or
4. All students satisfying the NCAA Division I standards for student athletes who are “full-qualifiers” or “academic redshirts”.

In lieu of ACT scores, students may submit equivalent SAT scores. Students scoring below 16 on the ACT or the equivalent SAT are encouraged to participate in the Year-Long Academic Support Program during their freshman year. (p. 97)

By stating specific qualifiers for admittance, the BOT is using threshold admission models (College Board, 1999). Section 602 of the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017) would grant APVD to a student with the following metrics:

Those Mississippi residents who applied and failed to meet Full Admission Standards along with any Mississippi high school graduate regardless of academic performance may, as a result of review, be admitted to the summer or fall semester. The ACT is not a requirement in this category. The review shall involve a consideration of high school performance, ACT scores (if available), placement testing, special interests and skills as well as other non-cognitive factors. The review shall result in placement in one of the following categories:

*Full Admission:* As a result of the review, students in this category may be placed as if admitted under Section B. In addition, students may be required to enroll in selected college level courses in science and social science equivalent to high school courses in which their background is inadequate. These courses will yield institutional credit.\* Other students in this category may be required to participate in the Year-Long Academic Support Program.

*Full Admission with Academic Deficiencies:* Students who have not demonstrated adequate readiness in English or Reading or Mathematics will be granted Full Admission with Academic Deficiencies to the Summer Developmental Program. This is an intensive program that concentrates on high school subject areas (English, Reading, and Mathematics) that are applicable to success in first-year college courses. These courses carry institutional credit.\* Students who successfully complete the summer program, by passing the developmental courses that they are determined to be deficient and the

Learning Skills Laboratory courses, will receive admission to the fall term with mandatory participation in the Year-Long Academic Support Program or some other Institutions of Higher Learning recognized intervention strategy to promote success in the courses in which they are not fully prepared, according to their highest ACT or SAT subtest scores. Students who fail to successfully complete the Summer Developmental Program are not eligible for enrollment in the regular academic year and will be counseled to explore other post-secondary opportunities, including those offered by community colleges. (p. 98)

A student, even though they may not have initially met the full admission requirements, could still be admitted. This occurs after a review of submitted materials: high school performance (not relegated to GPA), ACT, placement testing, special interests and skills, and other non-cognitive factors. This type of review is like that of a holistic admissions process. Additionally, if a student does not take the ACT, they could be admitted via a review process that does not require the student to submit ACT scores. Therefore, I wondered if this admission process is not only to assist in access for students with academic deficiencies, but also for students who are financially unable to take the ACT.

There was no differentiation between types of institutions on how to implement these admissions practices. Additionally, there were no specific details on how to support both retention and persistence. The state Institutions of BOT governs HBCUs and 4-year public state institutions. Furthermore, some of these universities have land grant designations. Each type of university has a different student profile. As such, support for the student population at each institution would look different. By not providing guidance on how university administration should construct the support matrix based on the admission model suggests that the governing

board has a lack of knowledge of difference between institution types, has not considered the effect of an admission model on the retention and persistence of students, and/or only focused on creating a pathway to allow as many students as possible into the university pipeline.

I arrived at multiple models of enrollment, by looking for elements of open enrollment threshold and holistic. Based on the research (College Board, 1999), there is nothing that specifies that a university ‘should not’ use multiple models for admission; however, the research (College Board, 1999) does note that each type of model produces a different student profile. Therefore, using all the types of admission models will inherently lead to a very broad and very dense student profile being admitted into the university. As detailed in the literature review for this study, each type of admission model will generate a particular student profile or student body make-up at the university. The socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of a student population will require certain resources (i.e. academic or monetary) be provided by the university in order for the admitted students to be successful. Therefore, along with each method for admitting students there should be a correlating support process for student success post admission. This support should come ready to assist students based on their academic and socioeconomic profiles, minimally. With varied methods of admitting students, the consideration came of whether the university had the resources to support students admitted via these very different pathways. Additionally, given multiple pathways for admission, consideration of how practitioners support students effectively became emergent.

### *Consistency*

In alignment with questions that guided my study, I sought to understand both the purpose of the current admission process and implementation practices of university administration. Therefore, I needed to understand if the admission policy was being both

interpreted and implemented consistently between the governing board and the case study institution. To determine consistency of interpretation and implementation, I looked for word usage in the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017), *Minutes* (BOT,1992), and the University's admission and recruiting documents. Additionally, I reviewed the documents to determine if BOT and the University referenced each other to show unity of thought and/or purpose.

Upon initial review of the Undergraduate Catalog (2019), and the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017), I observed consistency in the verbiage used to detail the admission policy, specifically the details related to APVD. For example, in the Undergraduate Catalog and the BOT *Policies and Bylaws* (2017), the pages mirror each other in the description of the admission processes available to students. They both go into detail about the process for: regular admission, admission with deficiencies, home schooled, and admission by examination.

Again, in the description of the Year-long Academic Support Program there is consistency between the University's documents and the BOT. They both go into to detail to say:

The Year-long Academic Support Program is designed to assist those students admitted with academic deficiencies, as well as other volunteer students, with their freshman courses. The Year-long Academic Support Program will consist of classroom, individual, and computer-assisted instruction with career counseling in a laboratory setting. The Program carries institutional credit.\*

\*Institutional credit courses do not count toward graduation but carry all other academic requirements. (BOT, p. 98, 2017).

Additionally, The BOT *Policies and Bylaws* (2017) gave the institution jurisdiction to extend the ability to be admitted via APVD to non-resident students based on enrollment numbers for that year

For this university, the verbiage is consistent between both governing documents concerning the ability for students to be admitted via APVD should they not initially meet the qualifications for full enrollment. However, there is a difference in how the BOT describes the year-long academic support program versus how the University describes the program. The *Policies Bylaws* (BOT, 2017) stated resident “students who have not demonstrated adequate readiness in English or reading or mathematics will be granted Full Admission with Academic Deficiencies to the Summer Developmental Program” (p. 101). The undergraduate catalog (2019) says resident students must apply to access the program.

This small gap in consistency leads to questions surrounding practice, and why the institution decided to add this step instead of a student automatically being selected to participate in this program based on admission materials. There are two ways to look at this inconsistency, and both regard student responsibility. The decision could have been made such that the institution administration only wanted this opportunity granted to students who were willing to put in the work to receive admission through the Summer Developmental Program. The idea here being that students will work harder for that which they put in effort. The alternative, however, is that there are not enough resources to support all students that could be admitted via the Summer Developmental Program, and therefore, due to limited space, students must apply for participation. Herein, however, becomes an oxymoronic approach to expanding access. In all other areas of the policy explaining the admission options, there is consistency; however, in this one area there is a diversion. There is a thread here. That thread seems to tie consistency

to capability. The capabilities of the university i.e. providing opportunity for all applicants to participate in the developmental program, determine the university's consistent alignment with the BOT's policy. Again, the larger picture is policy implementation seems to be structured to benefit the institution as opposed to the student.

Overall, the documents that described the admission process of the University were almost identical to the documents of the BOT. There was even a statement on the first page of the Undergraduate catalog that said:

#### Disclaimer

Until further notice, the admission information contained in this Bulletin most accurately describes the admissions policies, regulations, requirements and procedures of the University and the BOT. The University reserves the right to delete, substitute, change or supplement any statement in this Bulletin without prior notice. (Undergraduate Catalog, 2019, para 1)

The major take-a-way here is that consistency of policy implementation is tied to the resources of the university. The implementation of the admission process as described in the admission documents of the University mirrored what was described in the BOT *Policies and Bylaws* (2017). Therefore, if policymakers and administrators have ability to make policy and/or implement them, it would make sense that these policies could be structured to support the persistence of students. It is important to note that it is not negative or positive that there was a slight divergence on admission policy implementation by the university, rather this brings to light that there is possibility to shift policy. However, it appears that the shift is only made to the benefit of the university rather than students.

### *Lack of Historical Context*

In my initial review of the BOT's Policy and Bylaws documents I noticed two things particular to dates. Section 602 of the Policy and Bylaws (2019) details the freshman admission requirements for university system institutions. In this section, Part C details the requirements for admission with academic deficiencies. For the state residents that do not initially meet the requirements for full admission, they could be granted admission to a state university after successful completion of a summer and/or year-long academic support program. The earliest date of the BOT's minutes recorded under Part C were from May 1992. From my literature review, this date corresponds to the litigation of the U.S. v. Fordice (1992) case. Regarding the ruling of US v. Fordice (1992), Justice White wrote:

If the state perpetuates policies and practices traceable to its prior system that continue to have segregative effects—whether by influencing student enrollment decisions or by fostering segregation in other facets of the university system—and such policies are without sound educational justification and can be practicably eliminated, the state has not satisfied its burden of proving that it has dismantled its prior system. Such systems run afoul of the Equal Protection Clause, even though the state has abolished the legal requirement that Blacks and Whites be educated separately and has established racially neutral policies not animated by discriminatory purpose. (Fordice, 1992, p. 2737)

To provide some description of the socio-political context and how this may have shaped conversations in the state of Mississippi during the time the 1992 BOT voted in the APVD, it is helpful to know who was one the BOT at the time. Frank Crosthwait was a lawyer who had served as the attorney for the Sunflower County School District in August 1970 for United States

of America v. Sunflower County School District. In this court case, the defendants, were given these and other orders:

In accordance with the foregoing directive of the Supreme Court, this court, in *Singleton v. Jackson Municipal School District*,<sup>6</sup> rejected the contention now made by the School District here involved and ordered Marshall County School District and Holly Springs Municipal Separate School District (both in Mississippi) to adopt new school desegregation plans based upon geographic attendance zones and consolidated schools. We then concluded that 'testing cannot be employed in any event until unitary school systems have been established.' Moreover, we again disapproved achievement testing as a method of student assignment in dual school systems in the Tunica County, Mississippi school system. *United States v. Tunica County School District*.

The appellants are bound to realize that the district court and this court are required to follow the mandates and directives of the Supreme Court whose pronouncements are the supreme law of the land. 'Deliberate speed' is no longer a viable principle in school desegregation cases. If there is any doubt about time being of the very essence in cases of this kind, a quick glance at *Carter v. West Feliciana Parish Sch. Bd.*<sup>8</sup> should convince the most ardent skeptic. (*Sunflower County School, 1970, para 5*)

Mr. Crosthwait had defended a Mississippi school district in their fight to keep segregation laws within their school system. Governor Daniel Kirkwood Fordice Jr. ran for governor of Mississippi on the “campaign theme of passionate opposition to quotas and government affirmative-action programs” (Smothers, 1991). Interestingly, these same people were on the BOT for the Governor when the APVD addition to the admission policy was added. The APVD addition to the admission process was voted into the BOT *Policies and Bylaws* (2017) in May

1992. By this point, the BOT, and state of Mississippi had been in court cases since 1975 related to the State's lack of adherence to the Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. With stakeholders such as Frank Crosthwait and Governor Fordice serving as policymakers during the time that the APVD was created, it can be postulated that the decision for the insertion of the admission process change was connected to the political tensions of the time.

In 1995 *Ayers V Fordice* named the BOT as defendants which included Mr. Crosthwait along with his fellow BOT members: Diane Martin Miller, President; Nan McGahey Baker, Vice President; William S. Crawford, Ricki R. Garrett, Will A. Hickman, J. Marlin Ivey, James W. Luvane, J.P. "Jake" Mills, Carl Nicholson, Jr., Cass Pennington, Sidney L. Rushing. The lawsuit also named the Governor of Mississippi, Kirk Fordice, the Commissioner of Higher Education, W. Ray Cleere, Delta State University, Kent Wyatt, President; Mississippi State University, Donald W. Zacharias, President; Mississippi University For Women, Clyda S. Rent, President; University of Mississippi, R. Gerald Turner, Chancellor; University of Southern Mississippi, Aubrey K. Lucas, President. This case came after a series of court cases in which the plaintiffs accuse the state of Mississippi with perpetuating segregation laws and practices to keep from allowing Black and African American students into predominately White higher education institutions. Given the connection of the *US v. Fordice* (1992) ruling and time in which the APVD admission process was passed for Mississippi schools, there is cause to take into consideration the effect legal requirements had on the implementation of the APVD admissions process.

The *Minutes* (BOT, 1992) were the earliest minutes mentioned in the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017). Therefore, I expected that this document would explain why APVD was created. What I found, instead, was that the *Minutes* (BOT, 1992) did not detail anything different from

the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017). The *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017) simply copied the verbiage of the APVD addition to the admission policy that was voted on in the May 1992 BOT meeting. When reviewing the other sections of the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017), there did not appear to be extensive explanation of why those parts of the guidelines were created. However, when viewing later minutes from the BOT from October 1995, there was clear detail in the BOT's minutes discussing a change in the admission policy regarding student athletes. In the BOT *Minutes* (1995), the resolution states that the BOT accepted a recommendation from the President's Council that NCAA standards for "full qualifiers", for admission to a university, would be applicable for the upcoming school year. Additionally, it goes on to explain that this change is to be in alignment with NCAA standards for Division I institutions. When reviewing the BOT *Minutes* from October 1995, there was a clear lineage of information discussed as to how the policy came to be and why it was changing.

Oppositely, in the case of the APVD, there is no detail regarding the purpose or intent of the policy. Instead, the *Minutes* (BOT, 1992) only denote the verbiage of the policy and that "the admission requirements have been endorsed by the Board of Education and the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges" (p. 4). This is interesting because for a policy to be created in with such a tenuous socio-political issue with no detail or description as to why. This omission of information leads a reviewer to believe there was some intention behind this information being left out.

The 1975 case of *Ayers vs. Allain*. Jake Ayers, Sr. on behalf of his son and 21 other students, brought suit against the state of Mississippi. They argued that Mississippi "maintained a segregated higher education system and funded historically black colleges at lower levels than the state's five predominately white institutions" (Gehring, 2001). This case was dismissed by

U.S. District Court Judge, Neal Biggers. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court “under the allegation that the state of Mississippi had failed to dismantle the de jure system of segregation in higher education” (Lee, p. 168, 2010). The charge in the case of *United States v. Fordice* (1992) was that Mississippi was violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution (Lee, 2010). This United States Supreme Court case represents the most recent ruling directed towards states that have “historically maintained racially segregated systems of higher education” (Lee, p. 168, 2010). The *U.S. v. Fordice* case found that “Mississippi had not sufficiently integrated the state and must take affirmative action to change this under the Equal Protection Clause” (*United States v. Fordice*, 1992).

This document helps to tie federal legislation and BOT’s admission policy. Based on when it was created and the political climate of the time, it is reasonable to conclude that the APVD admission policy was created in forced response to the state of Mississippi not adhering to the Equal Protection Clause.

The creation of the APVD policy in response the state of Mississippi being sued for lack of adherence to the Equal Protection Clause as well as omission of this connection in both the *Minutes* (BOT,1992) and *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017). were drawn from inference and an in-depth analysis of the documents that support and outline the APVD admission process. As to why this connection was not referenced in the *Minutes* (BOT, 1992) or *Policy and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017) led me to believe that there was an intentional effort for this information to passed down or documented in the BOT’s historical documents.

Lack of historical context as an emerging finding was a distillation of facts pulled from several connecting documents. While it may not be practice noting the historical or contextual impetus

for the creation of a policy in the documents that describe its process. However, concern comes in when those that are responsible for implementing the policy as well as those who must adhere to the standards set by policy do not know or understand the historical foundation.

Based on my analysis, the APVD is meant to increase access for MS residents. Therefore, if APVD is an access mechanism created because the state risked loss of federal funding, it is fair to consider the effectiveness of the mechanism on those students it was meant to assist.

The emergent findings from phase I: multiple models of enrollment, consistency, and lack of historical context came from themes deduced from three levels of coding during document analysis. Each emergent finding, however, led to want of clarity that could only be provided from talking with practitioners at a university. Therefore, from each finding, I deduced gaps or lingering questions that were used to form the interview questions that were asked to practitioners. *Multiple models of enrollment:* From the document analysis, I found that elements of different types of admission processes made up the entirety of the admission policy.

Therefore, I wanted to determine if the practitioners knew this and how this knowledge impacted their work. *Consistency:* The policy's verbiage was consistent across the documents I reviewed; however, how the APVD provision was implemented across institutional departments for the benefit of students was less clear. *Lack of historical context:* How APVD as an admission process came to be was not addressed in the BOT documents, instead inferences were drawn from legal and narrative documents that discussed socio-political issues occurring at and around the time the APVD admission policy was created. Therefore, I questioned how the work of the practitioners was impacted if the documentation of the policy did not provide historical context.

## **Phase II Data Analysis: Interview Analysis**

### ***Conflict, and Confusion about the Admissions Process***

Throughout the interviews, a theme arose in which there was an undertone of open enrollment as a practice for admitting students.

My philosophy is that we are to educate everybody. And so whether they're prepared or not, if they're here, we then have to have the services to help them be prepared. And sometimes philosophically at institutions, it's we shouldn't be admitting their students or they shouldn't be coming here. And that's not our philosophy at Green University. So we do have to really think about those types of things. We always have to evaluate what we're doing because we never want to set a student up for failure. (Interviewee 1: Admissions Representative)

It was clear during the conversation that there was a commitment to admitting students. Open enrollment, as an admission model, does not require any prerequisite for admission outside of high diploma or equivalent. The statement made by Interviewee 1 aligned with the sentiment of the other respondents in that the University's purpose has a commitment to enrolling students. This respondent also states that it is important to consider not setting a student up for failure. Again, this sentiment was echoed in the responses of the other respondents. However, on both fronts, there is confusion on how to effectively approach these concepts. Atop that, there is a diversion in who is centered when thinking about the best way to approach admission and student success: the university or students.

There is a commitment to 'educate everyone' but there does not appear to be a clear picture, for administration on who is 'everyone'. Secondly, in 'educating everyone' it is not clear who that better benefits: students or the university. It seems that administration could be

committed to access which why they adhere to the admission policy, but it does not appear the work has been done to determine adhering to this policy centers and serves the students.

Respondents gravitated to describing varied methods for admitting students that didn't really adhere to a single form of admission practice, and throughout the interviews none of the participants were able to clearly name the type of admission process (i.e. holistic, threshold, or open enrollment). All interviewees were aware of the admission process and how it worked; however, there was disagreement regarding the metrics used as admission standards.

Well, I guess for us, because we have automatic admissions requirements. We're not doing a holistic review, so it's pretty cut and dry. So it's just taking evaluating a student. So a processor's looking at the GPA the student has whether they're a freshman or a transfer student. (Interviewee 1: Admissions Representative)

Interviewee 1 is an admission representative and clearly states that the metrics for determining admission are “cut and dry” due to the institution having “automatic admissions requirements”. The respondent goes on to note, specifically, that the institution is not doing a holistic admissions review. Therefore, it is interesting to review the next response from the same respondent.

I put this to you like semi- holistic and I can go into a lot of other information about this. But, you know, we look at the high school or the community college, we look at, you know, if they're transfer student. Where have they been out of? They've not been taking classes for a while. Was that something happened two or three years ago? There a high school student to see, you know? Did they do not well, one semester? Is a certain area they're not excelling in or they're struggling in. You know, we tried taking that environmental context. You know, if they're coming in first gen if they're a single parent household, knowing they're additional obstacles for those students. And so that may not

be looking at just the GPA and test for may not be the best predictor of their success. So, again, if they don't meet those automatic requirements, then we're evaluating and looking at that whole picture so we can then make a better judgment as to whether or not they're ready for a 4-year institution. (Interviewee 1: Admissions Representative)

The respondent states in this response that the admission process is “semi-holistic” in that the University reviewers take into consideration environmental contexts when making an admission decision on a student. This contrasts with what the respondent initially said. However, it is important to note that during the interview, the respondent did not present as being confused about the admission process. In fact, the interviewee was very confident and supportive of the admission process. Therefore, I ascertained that the goal of the admission process and the reviewers lent toward making it possible to admit as many students as was feasible. This is not to say that there was a lack of consideration given to the students’ success in this statement; however, this response made ‘admission possibility’ the overarching goal.

Similarly, each of the respondents describe the process of admission in ways that align with the varied types of admission processes.

As admissions professionals, because we are 100 percent admissions guaranteed, we only looked at an ACT score or test score GPA. And now thanks to COVID, which is going to help push us into a new area and kind of put us in the forefront we have now. We still ask for ACT or S.A.T.. Well, now we have the ability to review students without test scores.

(Interviewee 2: Admissions Representative)

For instance, because of the pandemic and people, you know, our admissions office was really pushed to make sure they got their numbers. And we actually grew our university because that's a big topic for our president. He's trying to push all these people that would

have typically been waitlisted and not accepted, got accepted. And so I have huge numbers of students in previous years and we've not been accepted that have 13s and 14s on their ACTS and they're in Biology 1. And I've got I'm at that triple the amount of those students I've ever had. (Interviewees 3: Student Support Administrator)

Here, Interviewees 2 and 3 describe a process akin to open admissions/enrollment. Interestingly, they are both describe the same circumstance and how the global pandemic has impacted admission practices. However, there is clearly a different feeling toward the impact based on the respondent's role at the university.

Every student in the state of Mississippi we treat as an inquiry. And what that means is if you look at the recruitment funnel, we purchased names from all over the country. And so we communicate with those students to try to get them to say, raise your hand. Hey, I'm interested and then once they do that, then we put them in an inquiry track of communication, which is more intense, more frequent communication than it is for what we would call a prospect just to someone's name we purchased. So along those lines, will do things a little bit differently for every Mississippi student. Regardless of score that they get, we treat them as an inquiry. And so they get all of our inquiry communication from us regardless of whether they tell us they're interested or not. Now they, this happens from time to time, if they say, hey, I'm not interested. Take me off your list. We'll certainly do that. But, you know, being the land grant institution for our state, we feel like we need to be in the business of making sure that all of our students in our state know and have information from us now. (Interviewee 5: Admission Representative)

This communication plan that the admission representative details aligns with open enrollment. These statements collectively describe elements of holistic, threshold and open enrollment. It is

interesting that there was an aversion to noting that the University uses multiple types of enrollment. It is this aversion that makes me think that purpose, intention, and effect of the admission policy are not in alignment. Therefore, instead of aligning with one method of admission, it is 'safer' to be open to all.

As stated earlier, the respondents all note different approaches or considerations for metrics used to admit students. The respondent below begins to highlight that contention.

Yeah, well, it's kind of interesting you ask that question. You know, sort of as I mentioned earlier, we have gone in really interesting. We have always been test optional. I mean you could always be admitted. With the 3.0 or 3.5 or 2.5 on the high school core without an ACT score, but so, you know, there's also obviously a national conversation taking place now about the test scores. ACT, S.A.T. and so we are looking at. We're looking at what type of measure can we use that is applicable across the board, whether you went to Ames High school or Jim Hill in Jackson, where I went. And so how do you measure? (Interviewee 5: Admission Representative)

There is movement to make admission to the university test optional. There have been goals to make this move for some time it would appear based on the conversation. COVID-19 moved timeline up to increase enrollment in the fall 2020/spring 2021 school year. However, there is less concern the testing metric because of the many methods of being able to admit students. Based on the interviewee, there was more concern with getting students to the university. I would also add that the university is looking for an admission metric or metrics that would provide a more holistic picture of the experience of students in relation to their academic success potential. This is something being currently explored.

It allows a student the opportunity to come to college. And I think that's where it's really needed. r, our admissions application is very or not are not our application, but our holistic review of just allow it to be a state institution and want to give back to the students, the state of Mississippi. And so very much and I don't know the word I'm looking for. It's not open enrollment exactly, but we're very our processes are more open than other institutions. And so it allows a student who was a student like me. I did not have a strong act score. I was just not my strength. My degree to go to grad school was not my strength, but I was good when I got in the classroom and I worked hard.

(Interviewee 6: Student Success Representative)

Throughout the interviews, some have described characteristics of open enrollment, others have used holistic and threshold. Overall, there is no clarity of admission model, and the practitioners, instead of stating the admission model, describe all the ways that the university admits students.

As stated in the literature review, land grant universities were created to provide pathways for education and training in technical and agricultural trades for the residents of the state. Some of practitioners interviewed leaned into the foundational purpose of land grant institutions as support for the admission practices used. However, there is a lack of congruence regarding the description of admission process as well its effectiveness per the responses of the interviewees. This phenomenon suggests that the “land grant” designation is being used to provide justification for the admission practices rather than the designation the admission practices being guided by the purpose of land grant institutions. If the later were the case, there would be a priority to ensure resources are available to support students who are eligible to be admitted via the admissions process. However, there is much to understand when the

administrators and practitioners who are responsible for admission and student success are unsure of how to clearly name/define the admission process. What does it mean if there is not clarity in the type of admission process being used? Does institution administration believe they are supporting students the best they can vs how they should? Is the convenience in an ambiguous admission policy, serving both the university and the students?

### ***Lack of Clarity in Naming the Admission Process***

The interview respondents generally use similar terminology to describe the admission process. While there is consistency in the description of the admission process, there is not consistency in being able to identify the admission process within the scope of the three main models of admission: holistic, threshold or open enrollment.

So we, I mean, basically have an open admissions policy. You could say in terms of, again, 2.0 and an 18 or 2.5 And a 16. So, for us, we're going out and spreading the word and trying to encourage students to think about going to a 4-year institution. So we're going to recruit everybody, no matter what their test or GPA is on the front end. And then once they are, you know, they submit their application, they're evaluated. Then we're going to either admit them or we're going to help provide them alternate routes to get admitted. And that may also mean going to the community college version, then transferring to Green University. But it's our job to help them once they've applied and submit all their documents to help them with the next steps of that path. And so that can look different for every student. (Interviewee 1: Admissions Representative)

In this statement and the next, the respondent describes holistic, threshold, and open enrollment in illustrating the admission process. There is a review of grade point average and ACT score:

threshold. The interviewee also discusses providing options for the student to eventually enroll in the university: open enrollment.

But for the most part, we have open admission for the most part because our admission standards are very broad and there's a lot of different ways. And now we have gone to test optional with in-state. We already had that option with BOT requirements and so on. So, once you apply, would you require a test score if they have it? They don't have it. We can admit them of the test score, high school transcript application. We do have an application fee in the end, our folks in admissions processing, as that information is submitted, will work the student's file. (Interviewee 5: Admission Representative)

Above, both respondents state that the university is “basically has an open admissions policy” or “for the most part, we have open admission.” This clearly states that the administrator aligns the admission process to open enrollment. Atop this, it is stated that the standards for admission are “very broad” and the BOT gave the university purview on how it wants to review admission metrics, or which admission metrics it wants use: holistic.

The respondents overarchingly agree that creating as many pathways as possible to admission encourages students to apply to the university. There is an underlying commitment get applicants then determine, based on their application materials, how it will be possible to admit the student. More simply stated, based on the interviewees’ responses, a pathway for admission is created for the student as opposed to a student being admitted based on a set of defined admission criteria.

If they meet the criteria for automatic admissions, we admit them. For Mississippi, a state of Mississippi student, that's a 16 on the ACT, a 2.5 GPA. Those students are automatically admitted. If you have that, you move on. It's a sliding scale. So if you have

below 2.5, you know, you can have an 18 on ACT and so forth. Then for out-of-state students, it's a 20 on the ACT 2.0 GPA. And you meet that, you have automatic admission. (Interviewee 2: Admission Representative)

Interviewee 2 introduces various conditions that students must satisfy as seek admission. Here the respondent notes a scaled process for determining admission whereas the grade point average decreases, and the ACT score increases and vice versa there is opportunity to be admitted. The scale for entrance is slightly increased for out-of-state students. This differentiation is likely tied to the land grant commitment with the goal being to provide easier entrance to the university for state residents. The respondent continues with the following:

Now, before I go even further into the weeds and as a Mississippi student, if you don't meet automatic criteria which do have ways to admit students, so students who have a lower 16 on the ACT, obviously they can continue to test to get the 16 or they can take what's called the Accuplacer exam. And the Accuplacer is a bit less strenuous than the ACT and it's based on subject areas. So we look at their ACT scores that they submitted and the areas that they're deficient in, we go and then require them to take the Accuplacer in that subject to. And so they can use that to get admitted. You could take the Accuplacer at all the public institutions in the state, and if your scores are high enough we'll admit you. Another opportunity is called the residual ACT. And that's the ACT light, basically. And so they take the residual ACT. They can only take that on our campus, but they can also take the residual ACT to get it. And then you add those options, but also for Mississippi students. We have what's called summer developmental program. So if they have below the ACT score for automatic admissions, they can do some developmental where they will come in second term of the summer session and

take intermediate courses. And then once they ask those intermediate courses at the end of the summer session, they're fully admitted to the university. So those are the ways for in-state students who don't meet automatic criteria for outstay. Students who don't meet don't meet the automatic criteria. They go to a review board and then the review committee looks at them and looks at things like the GPA. What areas are they deficient in? Why are they deficient? And they look at their ACT scores and then they make a determination of that. (Interviewee 2: Admission Representative)

The process seems intended to provide students with additional opportunities to prove their worthiness for admission using similar methods that excluded them. The process explained by interviewee 2 raises questions about the labor associated with pursuing admission through the designated open enrollment challenges.

Typically, if a student meets the instate requirements as an out of state student, if they meet the state requirements and we can review that student and see that it meeting them won't put them in significant debt because they will be eligible for scholarships.

Obviously, if we can review that student's see, it doesn't put them in significant debt. We would admit them. (Interviewee 2: Admission Representative)

Considerations of debt, however legitimate, don't seem to be appropriate for admission decisions, or at least not discussed or outlined in any of the presented models of admissions. In all, it seems that open enrollment at the university involves and serious of hidden hoops and unclear expectations.

In the previous response, there are elements of threshold enrollment when they state "If they meet the criteria for automatic admissions, we admit them. For Mississippi, a state of Mississippi student, that's a 16 on the ACT, a 2.5 GPA. Those students are automatically

admitted.” Additionally, there are elements of holistic enrollment when the respondent states, “Students who don't meet the automatic criteria. They go to a review board and then the review committee looks at them and looks at things like the GPA. What areas are they deficient in? Why are they deficient? And they look at their ACT scores and then they make a determination of that.”

Even for those administrators who are directly integral in the implementation of the admission policy, it is clear to see there was no consensus on how to define the admission process outside the use of ambiguous names or noncommittal terminology.

**All Respondents Were Aware of the Admission Process and How it Worked.** All the respondents were able to clearly articulate the multiple methods of enrollment and how those methods impacted their role at the university.

The easy answer is Green University is in the Mississippi institution of higher learning. So the Institutions of Higher Learning sets the standard for admissions for all eight public institutions in our state. Now, there are some you know, there's some leeway and some caveats where the institution is to make decisions at some point. Like, for instance, out of state students and the BOT had they set a criteria for out-of-state students and then said if they don't meet that criteria, it's up to the institution, decide if they admit it. (Interviewee 2: Admissions Representative)

This administrator clearly knew that there was a BOT that sets the criteria for admission. Additionally, the response indicates knowledge of the University's ability to make some adjustments to admission requirements based on the prerogative of institutional needs. What's interesting here, is that although the BOT set the policy, institutions have “leeway”, meaning that actors have space to negotiate those policies. Interviewee 2's knowledge of this leeway means

that they can and probably do take advantage of that negotiating space. Then the question becomes: on whose behalf do people work to adjust the admissions process/criteria?

Well, certainly the Office of Admissions and Scholarships is the primary funnel by which students enter the institution. And so in that sense, there is a set of criteria other than the completion of a high school degree in the state of Mississippi for out-of-state students.

We do have some admissions criteria that have been particularly related to the high school GPA of the student, as well as before COVID ACT or S.A.T. score. (Interviewee 4: Administrative Leadership)

This respondent identifies understanding the function of the admissions office in that this office navigates the varied ways students can be admitted to the university. Noteworthy here is again, the amount of leeway available to administrators. The variability in the admission process is noted by mention of COVID-19's impact on change to the admission process. Additionally, Interviewee 4 alludes to the fact that there was flexibility in the admission process event before the pandemic.

The responses, from different practitioners in different departments, suggest a general understanding of how the admission process at the institution works.

I will say, can I talk about an old position I have on campus? Oh, sure, sure. OK, so previously I worked with the College of Engineering and our admissions process was similar to the university admissions process where a lot of those factors are in whether a student can be admitted or mandated by the Institute of Higher Learning for the state of Mississippi. But in that role with engineering, we were approved to be able to have an additional admissions process to look more in-depth at the scope of their ACT scores and GPA on whether they were going to be admitted to the College of Engineering. So where

to where? A student who wanted to maybe go into communication if they got into Green University, they were able to get into their major. But if they selected the College of Engineering, we would take a deeper dive and look at their scores and some scores in specific areas, but mainly their cumulative composite score and GPA combination to see if they were able to be admitted into engineering. (Interviewee 6: Student Success Representative)

This response was particularly interesting because it suggests two phenomena. First, the response suggests that there is a general understanding, even on college departmental level, of how the admission process works in admitting students to the university. Secondly, the response suggests that particular colleges created more stringent criteria for admission into their “more difficult” majors. Interviewee 6 also illustrates that the college of engineering gets to adapt their admission process. This adds another “condition” or layer of consideration that expands or narrows student options. Herein is presented an additional level of implementation of university/BOT level policies. The most impacted in having to negotiate unclear policies and practices, again, are students. The benefit of this all is in favor of the institution.

Because we have automatic admissions requirements. We have flexibility of things we can do. However, we're not taking in evaluating thousands of students based off of different metrics. Right. You made it. You're in. (Interviewee 1: Admission Representative)

This description is consistent with a holistic admission process while directly indicating that the institution does use automatic admission. There is clear, and here stated, differentiation between what is espoused in practice and what is documented in policy. Terms such as “flexibility” are used instead of giving the admission process the correct terminology: open enrollment.

It is interesting that for a process to which the participants can describe, there is no identifiable name for the process. The respondents did have different areas of the admission process to which each were more likely to describe. Some would go into detail about metric requirements or lack thereof for the admission process. Other respondents reference how the admission process aligns with or complicates the land grant mission of the university. No matter the approach all respondents could speak clearly to the admission process. In all, the responses from the interviewees indicate that admission decisions were shaped by the context within which those decisions were happening, like in engineering. However, there is lack of clarity in how this flexibility benefits the needs of students. It is clear that that these decisions support the goals of the university in increasing student attendance or meeting attendance metrics for minority demographics; however, the benefit, in these variable admission practices, for students is opaque.

**Disagreement with Metrics for Admission.** There was no consensus amongst the respondents regarding the metrics that should be used or not used to make determination for admission into the university.

So, you know, as I mentioned before, I think that ACT certainly cannot be used as a metric to determine whether or not a student should be admitted. Well, let me say this.

Whether or not a student should be admitted and successful at the institution.

What is particularly interesting here is this respondent's pivot/correction. It seems to be that ACT as metric can be used for admission but not to predict the success of student. As an administrator whose primary is to support students once they are admitted to the university, the fact that metrics used to grant admission do not connect to a student's success at the university supports theme that threads all of the findings: admission practices and policies exist to benefit the goals of the university. This is not to say that some students are not cared for or even that

some students do not benefit from the policies and practices. Rather, it is to say that benefit to students admitted via pathways created by the APVD admission policy exists only at the point where interests converge for the university and the student. This is a haphazard approach to both student support and success. In a space that espouses access for all, there is a Darwinian undergirding to the current support matrix.

I think that so it's really hard for me to talk about what metrics should be in place, because I think it begins with what infrastructure you have in place. And right now, I think that we've got to get our infrastructure together to support students. (Interview 7: Administrative Leadership)

The role of this administrator in that they provide support for students post acceptance is important to recognize. The respondent addresses that the support matrix or infrastructure for student support is not well in place. As an example, the respondent notes apprehension with the ACT, a standardized test, to be a metric used to determine a student's admission qualification. When building a home, the would-be residents of that home are not able to move in it until the home has received approval from city inspectors and the like. This is to ensure that the space the owners will be living in is both safe and able to support basic needs like guarding from harsh weather conditions. To that point, Interviewee 7 is suggesting that the institution is admitting students into a space that has not yet passed inspection for the needs of the admitted students.

One of the things that I do appreciate about Green University is that, like, we're not an open, open, enrolled school, we will be considered less selective enough to maintain like a student can be admitted into Green University with a 14 on the ACT and a 3.0 GPA at our university. (Interview 7: Administrative Leadership)

With these statements, however, the respondent makes clear that the metrics used to admit students is less the concern. The support infrastructure of the university to ensure students persist, must be in place. Additionally, this respondent suggests that the process, while still unable to directly name the admission process, used to admit students is favorable in that it increases the accessibility of higher education. This administrator made clear that the support infrastructure to support students based on their varied levels of academic achievement, and collegiate cultural capital were not solidly in place.

I think because we don't because we're not holistic review and because it is sheer numbers based. We give more opportunities than competitive institutions. We have got to all start looking at environmental context. We do have to stop admitting students at Green University and say, hey, good luck. Go find all the resources that are out there. It's hey [student] you've been admitted based on who you are as an individual. You need to go to this resource. You need to connect it to this resource. You need to be doing these things versus trying to figure it out. (Interviewee 2: Admission Representative)

This respondent suggests that pre-college environmental context should be taken into consideration when making an admission decision; however, the participant did believe that the university provided more opportunity for admission than institutions that operated under more competitive admission structures. The respondent also suggests there is need for the university to provide more formalized institutional support for students admitted to the university. This point is somewhat likened to what Interviewee 7 stated about the need to create a support infrastructure for students to meet students where they are at the point of admission.

I work at a public institution for a reason, right? That I believe in access. And not all public institutions are highly accessible like Green University is. And so I think the

reality is that I believe in full access. We have to be prepared to help you navigate the institution in a way that leads [students] to graduation. And I personally, I also don't subscribe to the idea that everybody has to graduate with a 3.0 or a 4.0. You know, I'm happy if the student walks across that stage with the 2.0 and they've gotten their degree and they're going to be able to go back to their hometown or their community and earn a good living and to take care of themselves and, you know, do the things that they want to do. And hopefully we help them to become better citizens of the world and so forth.

(Interviewee: Administrative Representative)

The statement expresses the idea that academic prowess or admission metrics of a student is less non-consequential. Rather, access to the institution for the purpose self-development is of greater importance and relevance. However, the support system for students seems based on how much students reach as opposed to there being predetermined practices, guidelines, and policies to support students based on their academic needs.

### **Finding 1: Open Enrollment, but Not Really**

Open enrollment as a higher education institution admission policy that has no requirements for admittance. In the case of this study, the institution did not name its admission policy 'open enrollment'; however, the practice of administration was to describe the admission policy as open enrollment. Moreover, there were no specific details on policy implementation or naming, and when practices were used in the place of policy, there was lack of consistency in implementation. Green University, the case institution, used elements of the three types of admission: holistic, threshold, and open. There was a 'pick and choose' element that derived from my study of the admission policy used at the case institution. I came to this understanding through both document analysis and interview data analysis. Because there were numerous ways

in which a student could be admitted, the student profile of the institution was very diverse. Different enrollment methods created multiple levels of interpretation. Additionally, increased diversity meant an increased need for supports based on students' needs. Here, I went into more depth regarding intent and the historical context that surrounded the open enrollment practices engrained in the admission process I studied.

### ***Determining Intent***

Clarity of intent behind the use of an admission model provides space in creating an adequate support landscape. Analysis of the documents and interview data did not lead toward a clear reason or intent for creating the currently used admission policy. The data to support this inference was in the lack of data to counter this inference. Nowhere in the document analysis or interview data was found the reason for the admission process being created; neither the *Minutes* (BOT, 1992) nor the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017). Because intent is not stated, this led to closer review being needed. There appeared to be no study conducted into best practices to support the admission process adopted by the BOT. There appeared to be no specific supports established at the time of the creation of the policy. The *Minutes* (BOT, 1992) did not denote reference to types of enrollment or understanding of best practices related to those types of enrollment. Even though D. E. Lavin wrote studies, referenced in my literature review, in the late 1980s and early 1990s that discussed open enrollment and best practices to support students admitted into a university that used it as a method for admission. Instead, I found elements of multiple models of enrollment with no clear pathway to support students.

The BOT and the university have consistent documents to support the process for admitting students. There is a strong commitment to granting access to the university; however, there is less attention to providing modes of persistence. Based on the lack of academic support for

students admitted, it appears that the commitment to access to the institution masks the actual goal of increasing enrollment.

I guess this idea of non-selectivity seems important from an access perspective, and not to carry that around is like a badge of honor necessarily, but just that we are bringing students into our institution who come from a variety of experiences and backgrounds and perspectives. And so how do we as an institution create enough nimbleness or flexibility to meet students where they are and that's such a cliché thing, to meet students where they are. (Interviewee 4: Administrative Leadership)

The sentiment illustrated by the above respondent appears to describe a shared perspective of the other interviewees. Therefore, there is a recognition that a clear and defined support matrix must be created. What is less clear is why student success is just now becoming an institutional focus. Pockets of departments may have noticed gaps; however, it is not until now that there is a recognition of a systemic concern.

If I'm being completely transparent, because our president also is trying to get us to a certain enrollment level. And I've been with Green University [for over 15 years]. And so I've been able to see a pretty big shift in how we recruit people. Back when I was in high school or when I was actually in college then as a roadrunner on campus, and I thought about a case, where our admissions counselors were going to visit schools, they weren't necessarily going out of their way to go to our lower achieving schools. Now, they do, though, they're trying to get warm bodies, to be honest with you. So to fill seats. And we've also put admissions counselors all across the country as well. (Interviewee 3: Student Support Administrator)

This respondent also describes the perspectives of several respondents. However, the tone in this response equates admission practices less to the perspective that ‘we are providing opportunity’ and more to ‘we are willing to take whomever we can get to meet yearly metrics.’ My summation, again, is the consistent decline in marginalized students and the later impact it then has on recruiting those identities of students. Also consistent with this perspective is the lack of clarity in the support matrix. The BOT documents and university documents describe at great length the various methods of admission. However, neither go into much detail about the support network for students. When studying institutions that use open admission policy and/or practices such as Excelsior College, a part of an admission policy including extensive description of the support network for students based on their needs. However, there was no consistent process of support noted in either the documents or ascertained via the interview data. In fact, the interview data showed absence of a consistent and laid out process for providing academic support consistent with the various methods of admission.

Again, I think because we've always been a great school, I mean, there are lots of programs and offices and services. But at the same time, I do think the more people are in positions for a longer period of time, not having the connection with students on the front end and understanding what they're going through, I think it's harder for them to maybe adapt as we know. So I do think the university is doing a good job of continuing to create and to try to assist students in all different backgrounds. But it is challenging at a university setting when people are not interacting with their students every day like our team is about. (Interviewee 1: Admissions Representative)

Here the respondent alludes to two ideas. First, support for students is based on the administration and staff who hold positions to support students. Secondly, there is no defined or

centralized support network for students who need it based on academic need. All these data add up to the understanding that there exists an admission policy that grants access to students with little barrier. However, there is not any policy that then supports the vary diverse student profile of the university.

This is a little bit out of my wheelhouse, but falls under the umbrella of student affairs is I know that we have the summer developmental program for students traditionally summer developmental program for the summer. And so right now, our scope is focusing heavily on those students (Interviewee 6: Student Support Representative)

There was an assumption made that the student affairs division, specifically, is structured to support student success. While in part this is true, I think it's important to note that the respondent's office is the most intensely focused office on student success. Therefore, there is need for a streamlined process to connect students with resources according to need. This is important to note because per the other responses, this role has fallen under academic affairs where this person works.

In all, these responses in addition to the document analysis led me to draw the conclusion that the policy was created to increase enrollment. Diversity of the student body occurred as result of an osmotic phenomenon. Access to needed student support occurred haphazardly in that depending on which administrator a student engaged with determined the support to which the student was connected.

### ***Considering Historical Context***

Given the connection of the US v. Fordice ruling and time in which the APVD admission process was passed for Mississippi universities, there was cause to take into consideration the effect legal requirements had on the implementation of the APVD admissions process. The BOT

convened in May of 1992. During this convening, according to the *Minutes* (BOT, 1992), there was introduced additional pathways for admittance: APVD. Important also to note is the U.S. v. Fordice case of 1992 which found that Mississippi's predominately White institutions were in violation of the Equal Protection Clause. The creation of the APVD addition to the admission process ran in tandem with the US v Fordice ruling.

The *Minutes* (BOT, 1992) were the earliest minutes mentioned in the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017). Therefore, I expected that this document would explain why APVD was created. What I found was that the *Minutes* (BOT, 1992) did not detail anything different from the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017). While there is no direct statement from the BOT linking the APVD admission policy to the ruling of US v Fordice, the historical context cannot be easily ignored. As has been referenced throughout my study, intention behind policies related to access and diversity efforts are important if there is going to effective impact for the group(s) meant to be supported. Therefore, if we are to draw connection between the timing of the court ruling the APVD admission process, it can be surmised that the intention behind the policy was created to forego losing federal funding. By creating varied pathways for admission, the state of Mississippi could assert its adherence to the federal ruling.

It was interesting that the *Minutes* (BOT, 1992) did not detail the reasons behind the creation of a policy. There appears to be no study conducted into best practices to support the admission process adopted by the BOT. There appeared to be no specific supports established at the time of the creation of the policy. The *Minutes* (BOT, 1992) did not denote reference to types of enrollment or understanding of best practices related to those types of enrollment. This was despite the fact that D. E. Lavin wrote studies, reference in my literature review, in the late 1980s and early 1990s that discussed open enrollment and best practices to support students

admitted into a university that used it as a method for admission. Again, this led me to draw the conclusion that the policy was created as a means to an end as opposed to actually wanting to increase diversity and access. Knowing and understanding intent helps to determine if the support landscape of the institution contributes to or interrupts educational access inequalities. For practitioners, there is no clear approach to supporting students who are admitted and need additional support. There does not appear to be any policy or procedural address of the historical context that led to the current admission policy (in the minutes where this policy was decided upon or in university documents). Per the historic data that coincides with policy changes in the admission process, the only reason why the admission policy was created is because this university and other state institutions were going to lose their federal funding due to the illegal continuance of segregation practices that kept Black students from being admitted. This was in violation of the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment.

There is reason behind the confusion in the implementation of admission policy. For lack of knowledge or attention the historical context surrounding the creation of the APVD admission process, there has not been intentional effort into addressing where and how this policy falls short in supporting the students it is proposed to benefit.

A successful support matrix for the student profile created by the type of admission process outlined by the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017) could include individualized learning plans, direct connection to assistance with writing and computational skills, 24-hour tutoring, coaching support for life-family, work, financial, and time management concerns, library support team, and peer networks (College Admissions Models, 2019; Lavin, 1990). However, a support matrix stems from clarity of intent and understanding of why intent behind admission policy implementation.

Environmental and societal contexts have evolved since 1992; however, the intent behind the policy has not seen the same evolution. The state's initial reason for creating the policy was strictly granting physical access, not persistence support. Hence, the lack of attention to methods of persistence. Therefore, as it is advertised that the university is prideful of its current diversity, so too does its actions need to reflect pride in development of an extensive support network that is representative of its diversity.

### **Finding 2: Lack of Context = Lack of Student Support Matrix**

From the document analysis conducted during this study, I deduced themes of consistency and lack of historical context. Both ideas evolved during the conversations with the university practitioners. There was consistency across admission documentation from the BOT as well as the university process. Additionally, how practitioners described the admission process was consistent. However, when it came to discuss how the administrators described the support processes for students, this varied greatly. Post the document analysis of BOT documents and University documents, I could find little to no difference in the description of the admission process. Therefore, the variance in description of the support framework for students was curious considering there was so much alignment in the documentation of the admission process. From this juxtaposition, I understood there was a gap of informational context surrounding the admission policy. Therefore, I needed to consider purpose, implementation, and intent vs. impact. The historical context during the time in which the admission policy was created became the key to revealing the factors that led to the disconnect between the process for admission and the lack of a structured student support matrix.

### *Participants' Understanding of Student Needs*

Whether discussed in terms of merit or financial need, participants generally supported the idea that there was need to provide monetary support for successful persistence through the university. Additionally, respondents spoke to the need and development of co-curricular supports for students.

We're gonna have a new need-based scholarship program that's just based off of GPA. And so a student can as long as the students admitted to the university and submits the FAFSA, they will be eligible for this need based scholarship program. It's going to meet a percent of their need. So a student can have a 2.0, can have a one point eight. And they would still get the scholarship from us. Again, we see that need to know that there was a gap of students that we weren't helping in providing and making affordable coming Green University. And we needed to do that from the student success perspective. Those are students that typically have a harder time being successful. So we have to have that conversation with them. So they're knowing we may have more students enrolling better maybe at a lower academic level, because now they're gonna have aid. (Interviewee 1: Admission Representative)

The participant's response references methods of address for financial need. However, it was not clear whether this focus on financial need was to increase enrollment or positively impact retention. This nuanced point is drawn because the university does not seem to have requisite increase in resources to support academic need per participant responses. There is strong support for providing aid for students based on need rather than merit; however, there were little to no specifics on address of academic deficits.

You know, for us from a personal standpoint, for us to be able if we know students need additional support and that is a one to one basis. The ones that we do know, if we know they're having challenge, they've lost a parent or, you know, they are coming out of foster care system. You know, when we know those things, we put them in contact with offices on campus. Also, when we're thinking about policies and procedures in terms of not only admitting students, but scholarshipping students, because scholarships is it is a big part of the recruitment and admissions process. Right. To the affordability side that can help alleviate a lot of stress, but then also being responsible in providing this great scholarship for a student. Is there going to struggle? We have to then have resources for them. And philosophically, that's where some things change, depending on who you're talking to at different universities. Again, for us, because we're a land grant school. (Interviewee 1: Admission Representative)

Here there is reference to the university's status as a land grant institution regarding the need to provide financial support for students. The respondent appears to believe that to adhere to the university's purpose to provide education to the state's students, the university must find ways to financially support those students.

*We're task forcing. There's a task force on everything. Honestly, our provost came in and basically said we need to rethink everything we do and rethink it from the standpoint of are we meeting the goals that we're supposed to meet. So right now, everything's under review. So everything from an academic perspective because the provost oversees all the academic areas and institutions. And we're reviewing all of that. I think from a student, student, affairs standpoint. The department's is. Has done a better job of being intentional in their probe, not just programing like programmatic things, but like in the*

*programs that they create and things that they highlight seems to be more intentional and more real. It used to be many years ago you could be a part of Greek life and you know and live on campus. But now we're having real meaningful conversations about, you know, student counseling and the health center and support for underrepresented and marginalized communities. (Interviewee 2: Admission Representative)*

This respondent was discussing how current leadership is reviewing its academic support processes within academic affairs. In student affairs, there was visible attention given to the development of co-curricular supports. The respondent referenced the use of task force groups to spearhead these changes which denotes that practitioner recognized that there was a gap in support for students. My only question with this was the timing. It was not clear at the time of this interview the catalyst for the creation of the task force groups to address student support. However, post this interview, this respondent provided me the report from the task force for student success (Appendix C).

The report details the charge of the task force was to examine the following:

1. A complete inventory of all activities and programs we currently have that are relevant to student retention and success.
2. A complete analysis of where these programs are overlapping or duplicative, where there are gaps, and how these efforts could work together in a more holistic manner.
3. An evaluation of programs at other universities to determine where there are good examples of what we can do or should do better.
4. Most importantly, without constraints of what we are currently doing, stepping back and thinking about the drivers behind a lack of student success and determining how

we could assist students in fundamentally different ways, taking these drivers into consideration.

The recommendations from the Student Success Task Force (2020) included:

1. Recommendation 1: Develop institution-wide capacity for student success practices across all colleges and divisions
2. Recommendation 2: Encourage greater emphasis on student success for first-generation, low-income students
3. Recommendation 3: Create a culture that addresses disparities in retention and graduation rates among under-represented students, particularly African-American students
4. Recommendation 4: Increase efforts to bolster first-year to second-year retention rates
5. Recommendation 5: Deliver effective and consistent advising experiences across all student populations
6. Recommendation 6: Increase the number of bachelor's degrees awarded across all student populations (p.3)

Why was it at this time, the decision was made to address needs that, per the respondents of this study, have existed for years? Beside the impact felt by the university due to the COVID-19 pandemic, noticeable decreases in overall and Black student graduation rates were noted in the data despite the constant increase in student enrollment. From 2010 to 2020 enrollment grew from 14,602 students to 18,792 students. However, the retention rate of Pell Grant-eligible student fell from 80.3% in 2010 to 71.2% in 2017. For the same span of time, the retention rate of Black students fell from 80.8% to 67.4%. Graduation rates for the entire university fell from 60.4% in 2008 to 58.4% in 2012. Pell Grant eligible students' graduation rates fell from 48.7%

to 42.4%. Black student graduation fell from 48.1% to 37.8%<sup>9</sup> (Student Success Task Force, 2020). Again, when using monikers that denote being inclusive to all or the “most diversity university in the SEC”, it becomes hard to use those designations when the metrics do not support those words.

Again, we see the recognition and understanding of student needs based on the current support network of the university. In tandem with the academic and co-curricular support structured outlined in the task force document and through responses from this study’s participants, there was recognition that there needed to be financial aid support, as noted below.

And then also part of what we thought was particularly important is aligning our funding and our scholarships to support the work that we've been doing. So again, now we are awarding more scholarships based upon the need base. One of the things that we've also realized that oftentimes when we look at our data, we're losing students who are in their senior year of graduating and then they leave because they have financial barriers that don't allow them to complete. So we have instituted a new grant program for students who are within the last 30 hours of graduation and have a financial hold on their account so students don't have to come and ask for this grant. We are internally, through our financial aid system, automatically looking at students who have a balance on their account and on awarding them the last bit of money that they need in order to graduate. And so our goal is to help students get over into graduation as a result of this. And so all of these particular processes, we think, will absolutely help students achieve success as well as overcome a lot of obstacles and barriers that exist. (Interviewee 7: Administrative Representative)

Additionally, the respondent noted in our conversation that a relationship with community colleges help to support financial concerns of students. The respondent does not note necessity of a formal relationship; however, there is mention a quasi-relationship.

So for us in the state of Mississippi, we have a statewide articulation agreement. So every community college in the state of Mississippi, we have all of the courses articulated to us. So we don't have a partnership like with the [community colleges] where some schools do, in other states where if you don't meet certain requirements or you can be part of their bridge program, so you go to the community college, but you're still a you know, a student at the 4-year. We do not have that. I think also because our community college system is very strong and we also don't want to necessarily just be in an agreement with one institution. But we do have partnership and pathway programs for all community colleges in the state and some outside of the state as well. (Interviewee 1: Admissions Representative)

Whether the need was financial or co-curricular, the practitioners I interviewed had a clear view of student needs even though their approach to addressing those needs varied. Additionally, as was detailed in the information given to me by Interviewee 2, there appeared to be a broader understanding of student needs by upper administration. Again, as was detailed by the respondents and in the report from the task force, there was no clear approach or support matrix at the time of this study to support students. The task force appeared to have laid out a plan to re-structure staff; however, there was no clear approach to creating a support matrix to assist students in their persistence.

### *Students are Falling Through the Gaps*

Academic advising is one of the areas noted during my interviews to need address. One respondent stated that advisors were not trained to support students who are admitted via APVD pathways. The respondent stated that advisors were not specially trained to support students who are in academic risk on the front end. The respondent goes on to state this is not even inclusive of students who are admitted who appear to not be academically at risk when admitted but eventually need additional resources.

And so our advisors don't go through formal training when they place students in courses.

And so that that creates a whole other barrier for students and a whole other layer that is challenging for students in order to navigate their courses.(Interviewee 7: Administrative Representative)

Interestingly, one of my participants revealed that data is manipulated to show access programs support students, and later found the programs do not actually do what they were intended to do. In this case, the respondent referenced remedial courses and support courses. These courses have cost and credit hours; however, they do not count toward degree requirements.

The thing that we have found, though, is that the data is demonstrating that these courses don't lead to student success. There's nothing about these courses that demonstrates that they are leading to retention or even persistence among students in the courses. So now we're going through a process where we're redesigning the courses. So I think that I thought I think that what happened is we have several programs at the university that talked about how their work is rooted in and student success and how their programs are really achieving student success. And so then and the truth is, is that you can make data, do whatever it is that you want to do. Right. So, like, it was a manipulation of the data to

say like these programs, these initiatives lead to student success. And so but one of the things that many of our student affairs practitioners knew was that the programs were not leading to student success (Interviewee 7: Administrative Representative)

This respondent disclosed that data was being reported from these student success programs to show that they were providing support; however, upon an administrator calling out this discrepancy, the task force for student success was put together. This statement supports the idea that there was more importance on getting students into the university as opposed to putting resources into finding the way to support students. What's more the response from this participant supports the data in my literature review that notes the unreliability of remedial coursework.

### ***Access Without Success***

There is consensus that there are many successful pathways for admission to the institution. Additionally, there were multiple instances where respondents discuss tools in place by the university meant to support students as they navigate the university. However, as the interviewees discuss these tools, there is both stated and undertones of the administrators not believing these tools are effective.

And so those students are then marked with that score, which that score relates to their projection of success on our campus. They're marked in in the system, in student success. They're office. Suppose caters to those students in a certain in a certain way and supports them a certain way. But so in theory, the students of success offers. Their goal is to obviously increase retention and support students who need the support. And so they created this system to identify students who are at risk statistically and to support those students. I can't speak to any mechanism they actually have or that they actually use one

because I don't know of them and I don't know if they exist. But that's system is in place.

So what I do with that, I don't know. (Interviewee 2: Admissions Representative)

When remarking on this comment, there was some sarcasm and in the tone of the respondent.

The respondent expounded on their sarcasm as to say that while there is a mechanism in place to help detect academic risk factors, they do not know of any programs that are in place to then support those students. This is concerning for two reasons. First, if there are resources and the admission counselor is not aware of those resources, it would be impossible for that person to counsel a student about support mechanisms. Secondly, if resources for effective student success are non-existent, this is wholly problematic. Either way, both concerns lead toward greater disparity.

Following, the respondent notes both knowledge of the admission process and dually highlights some of the ways the Green University uses the admission process as a method for admitting as many students as possible.

Yes, into the Office of Admissions and Scholarships is really where all that's done and undergraduate admissions is different than graduate admissions of graduate admission to actually go to the graduate school. But undergraduate admissions goes to enrollment management and there's an entire office of admissions and scholarships and they've gotten quicker at kind of their mechanism. If you meet these benchmarks, boom, your admitted, it's no problem. But then if you're if you're slightly below those benchmarks, let's say you're an out-of-state student at a state, students don't have to go by those typical standards because they're not Mississippi residents. And so you might have a student that if they were in the state of Mississippi, they would have been admitted. But we can be more picky on our out-of-state students. Granted, you weren't this year. We just about

admitted everybody, you know, let you know we had a girl in my office who wanted to go to Alcorn State. That's where she wanted to go. That's where her family all goes. She didn't get admitted to Alcorn and she got admitted to Green University. Completely different types of schools. I'm not saying that Alcorn's not a good school, but when it comes to the level of education and the expectations, completely different. (Interviewee 3: Student Support Administrator)

I thought this was interesting. Here you have an in-state student who was not granted access to another land grant institution, seemingly with the same goals as the case study institution; however, the student was granted access to this institution. In conjunction with the admittance that there are lacking resources, I question the institution's commitment to their prescribed ideas of providing education to the state's occupants. At what cost? Who is being benefitted?

In a similar frame of thought, the next response notes dissonance between admission standards and pathways for student success.

And so I think we also have to take an individualized approach by which we admit students to the university, that we can also just look at their GPA alone as an indicator of whether or not they can be admitted, they should be admitted or be successful here at the institution. I think our admissions process is less about the student and there's more about the institution. So it's more about the institutions infrastructure to support any student that we select to come to Green University. (Interviewee 7: Admission Representative)

I thought this was interesting. Most respondents alluded to the idea that the ACT and SAT and even sometimes the grade point average were not great indicators of the potential to be academically successful at the institution. Despite their understandings of the admission process

or their knowledge of the lack of a stream-lined student support matrix, the fundamental belief was that if admitted to the university, any student had the potential to be successful. Believing this, practitioners used their knowledge and individual understanding of university resources to support students as best was possible. While availability of resources varied and knowledge of resources varied, resolve in supporting students was ever present.

This finding highlights a confluence of the concept of access. Therefore, when it comes to implementing the admission policy, there is not a clearly defined framework for supporting admitted students. Institutions that use open enrollment effectively are purposed to admit students using little to no prerequisites for admission. Additionally, they would have done the work to create student-specific supports that fall within their support matrix. Understanding and knowing the initial purpose of their enrollment framework leads to a clearly defined support matrix. However, when the initial purpose of the admission policy implementation was to address access of non-White students to state universities due to systemic racial discrimination, and no work was done to put in place effective student supports, it is the students who are still left wanting.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### **Conclusion Introduction**

This chapter is a discussion of my analysis of the discursive framing of admission policy at a land grant institution in Mississippi. Following, I provide a discussion of my findings drawn a multi-level document and interview analysis. Based on these findings I draw recommendations for future research, and implications for practice, especially for stakeholders and higher education policymakers. Lastly, I provide personal reflections and a summary of this study.

#### **Summary of Methodology**

To better understand how open enrollment practices were enacted, it was necessary to get a rich and contextual understanding of the policies that have shaped open enrollment practices, and the ways administrators and practitioners enact open enrollment commitments; therefore, I conducted a critical qualitative investigation of open enrollment policy implementation at a 4-year public university in the state of Mississippi in order to understand the overall impact of the policy's implementation on the student experience. I used a discourse historical approach within a broader case study methodology to guide my collection and analysis of the data.

I engaged two data collection methods as I sought to answer the research question guiding this study, document collection and analysis and semi-structured individual interviews. Combined, document analysis and semi-structured interviews provided a holistic view of the socio-political context at the time of the admission policy being created, gave clarity as to the

dissonance in the implementation of state's admission policy, and how practitioners interpret policy for inform their practice. These data, therefore, addressed directly the research questions that informed my study.

To structure my analysis, I used components of DHA. Address of the historical aspects of discursive acts were investigated through two methods in DHA (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). The first step was to integrate all obtainable information on the "historical background and the original sources in which discursive events are embedded" (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p. 91). Therefore, I conducted a document analysis of minutes documented by the BOT.

The second step was to address the historical dimensions of discursive acts is to investigate the ways certain types of discourse are subject to diachronic change (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). Therefore, I made the decision to do a document analysis of the BOT *Policies and Bylaws* (2017) as well as the university's admission and related policy. However, change in meaning is also shaped by spoken language. In as much, for me to gain a holistic view of the impact of admission policy on how practitioners perform their work, I felt it was necessary for me to conduct semi-structured interviews as well. Each method of data collection is distantly discursive and serves to create a holistic picture surrounding the historical context and meaning making associated with the creation and implementation of policy that uses open enrollment practices.

### **Summary of Findings/Themes**

I used discourse-historical analysis (DHA) to structure the analysis of the data. DHA focused on language as it was used and time and context in which the language was created; therefore, discourse is seen as a social practice: discourse is an action (Forchtner, 2011).

Therefore, discourse-historical analysis is uniquely tasked to study policy creation and implementation.

Reisigl and Wodak (2001) described three interconnected concepts of discourse-historical analysis: text or discourse immanent critique, socio-diagnostic critique, and prognostic critique.

I used these to align the findings and address the research questions that guided the study.

Following, the findings and DHA concepts are delineated according to research question addressed and the related findings. However, as referenced throughout this study, interrogating policy creation and implementation is inherently discursive, as such a valid argument could be made that each research question and its related findings could be aligned with any of the analytical concepts. However, to clearly summarize the findings, I used the alignment depicted in Table 9.

Table 9

*Address of Research Questions through Discourse-Historical Analysis*

Discourse Historical Analysis Concept	Text or discourse immanent critique	Socio-diagnostic critique	Prognostic critique
Research Question	How are state enrollment mandates enacted at case study institution?	How do their practices contribute to or interrupt inequalities that they were meant to address?	How are open enrollment practices implemented by practitioners?
Finding Themes	Theme 1: Open enrollment, but not really Theme 2: Determining intent	Theme 3: Considering historical context Theme 4: Lack of context= lack of student support matrix	Theme 5: Participants' understanding of student needs Theme 6: Students are falling through the gaps Theme 7: Access without success

### ***Research Question One***

The first research question asked: how are state enrollment mandates enacted at case study institution? This question more pointedly addressed the concept of text or discourse immanent critique. Reisigl and Wodak (2001) stated that this concept of DHA aimed at discovering inconsistencies, contradictions, paradoxes, and dilemmas in the structures internal to the text or discourse. Research question one focused finding the divergence or convergence of policy text for the purposes of policy implementation. Two themes arose from the findings in address of this question. The major finding was Open Enrollment, but Not Really and Determining Intent was a sub-finding.

**Theme 1 (Primary): Open Enrollment, but Not Really.** Study of the admission policy and practice for this project found that there are elements of the three types of admission models: holistic, threshold and open. Through document and interview data analysis, it became clear that Green University used a ‘pick and choose’ approach to admission practice. The stated policy made it such that if a student did not meet a specified entrance metric, there was in place another way in which that student could be admitted into the university. One participant stated during their interview, that it is very rare that a student was not admitted to the university, even going as far to state that the university uses an open enrollment model. It for this reason that, outwardly, the model of admission presents as open enrollment. However, my literature review of admission policy made clear that no matter the methods used to admit students, there to must be equal support resources in place to ensure those students’ collegiate success. Therefore, as the study progressed, it became clear that in focusing on understanding how to successfully implement an open admission model, it was also important to understand the intent behind the

creation of the admissions policy in concert with the historical context that led to the current admission policy being used.

Multiple models of enrollment created multiple ways a student could be admitted; therefore, Green University's student profile was diverse. Increased student diversity leads to an increased need for support diversity. This phenomenon unto itself is not problematic. There is only concern when the university is not set to provide the diversity of support needed. As such, concepts of intent and historical context regarding the admission policy implementation were found to be important in understanding the functionality of the admission policy at the case institution. As an analytical structure, discourse-historical analysis, through the concept of text or discourse immanent critique framed the evolution of 'open enrollment, but not really'. Considering when the policy was created then implemented and the overall disconnect to the context of when this study was completed, a historical perspective highlighted the inability to directly name the type of admission policy or its purpose. Table 9 outlines how finding 1 addressed the research questions that guided this study.

**Theme 2 (Sub): Determining Intent.** Knowledge of the intent behind the use of an enrollment model was needed to create an adequate support landscape for student success. Data analysis yielded no clear reason or intent for initially creating the currently used admission policy. Additionally, the data were lacking information to counter this inference. Moreover, the data yielded no reference to best practice benchmarking or assessment by the BOT or Green University into methods of support based on the admission policy. My literature review revealed that any method of enrollment had the potential to generate an environment conducive for student success; however, the common denominator for implementation of a successful admission was that there was a clear support landscape that included easy access to curricular

and co-curricular resources. The BOT and the university had consistent documents to support the process for admitting students. There was a strong commitment to granting access to the university; however, there was less attention to providing modes of persistence. The data analysis revealed that the commitment to access to the institution masked the actual goal of increasing enrollment. Again, using text immanent critique in my analysis, if care could be taken to ensure the admission process was clearly outlined, the same care could have been given to how to support students if institutional actors wanted.

### ***Research Question Two***

Determining the intent behind the creation of the admission policy led to questioning some of the access disparities perpetuated despite the implementation of an open access admission policy. Socio-diagnostic critique is concerned with demystifying the — manifest or latent — (possibly persuasive or “manipulative”) character of discursive practices. Using this concept, as the analyst I made use of my background and contextual knowledge and embedded the discursive event in a wider frame of social and political relations, processes and circumstances. On this level, social theories were drawn upon to interpret the discursive events. This indicated that the DHA is inherently interdisciplinary. (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). The next question I posed was how do administrators’ practices contribute to or interrupt inequalities that they were meant to address? The primary finding for this question was Lack of Context Yields Lack of a Student Support Matrix. The sub-finding was there was need to Consider Historical Context behind policy creation and implementation methods.

**Theme 3 (Sub): Considering Historical Context.** The BOT *Minutes* (1992) showed the addition to the state’s admission policy: APVD. Also happening in 1992 was case of U.S. v. Fordice. Amongst the findings of this case was that Mississippi’s predominately White

institutions were in violation of the Equal Protection Clause found in the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the United States Constitution. While the *Minutes* (BOT, 1992) nor do the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017) note the precipitating factors for adding an admission process that outlines multiple modes of entry into the university, it is fair to draw the conclusion that creating a policy with little barrier for admittance was in response the finding of the U.S. v. Fordice case. Additionally, continuing to be in violation of the Equal Protection Clause would have led to the state losing its access to federal education funding.

Here to, there must be a consideration of intent. Data analysis revealed that the intent of the admission policy was to create varied pathways for admission so that the state of Mississippi could assert its adherence to the federal ruling. The data do not show assessment or research conducted into the creation of a successful support matrix for the implemented admission process. Again, the lack of data show that intent behind policy implementation was avoidance of federal sanctions.

While there is nothing to be done about what transpired and why in 1992, the concern is that environmental and societal contexts have evolved since 1992; however, the intent behind the policy has not seen the same evolution. The state's initial reason for creating the policy was strictly granting physical access, not persistence support. Hence, the lack of attention to methods of persistence. At the time of data collection, there still existed no documented consideration of the historical context that led to the current admission policy being implemented. Additionally, outside of individual department's best practices, there were no uniform or streamlined supports outlined for students that continued from admission to graduation. Therefore, as it is advertised that the university is prideful of its current diversity, so too does its actions need to reflect pride in development of an extensive support network that is representative of its diversity.

**Theme 4 (Primary): Lack of Context = Lack of Student Support Matrix.** Through data collection and analysis two pervasive themes were consistency and lack of historical context behind policy creation and implementation. When reading both BOT and university-specific documents related to admission policy, it was evident that there was no difference in how the admission policy was described. Additionally, when speaking to the administrators, there was consistent descriptions given of how students were admitted no matter the functional area of the administrator. What varied, however, was how administrators understood support to be provided to students admitted to the university. Considering the mirroring of written policy and verbal description of the process for admitting students, it was interesting to notice the exact opposite when it came to understand the support matrix provided for students based upon the academic needs. Socio-diagnostic critique provided a framework to think about how the historical context during the time in which the admission policy was created became the key to revealing the factors that led to the disconnect between the process for admission and the lack of a structured student support matrix. Table 9 detailed how finding 2 addressed the research questions that guided this study.

### ***Research Question Three***

After interrogating the consistency and inconsistency of policy between the state governing board and the case institution, it would be important to pose the question: how are open enrollment practices implemented by practitioners? In discourse-historical analysis, prognostic critique contributes to the transformation and improvement of communication (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). Having a policy is one thing; however, discovering how the interpretation of the policy happened was crucial to understanding the overall impact of the admission policy. Additionally, understanding the historical underpinnings that contribute to the

actual intent of the policy, provided the needed context to make necessary policy adjustments as to upset engrained racism, sexism, and oppressive barriers that impede upon the academic success of systemically marginalized students. For this research question, I found three sub-findings that addressed this question: Participants' Understanding of Student Needs, Students were falling through the gaps, and the institutional ideology lends toward supporting Access without Academic Success.

**Theme 5 (Sub): Participants' Understanding of Student Needs.** Generally, the interview respondents spoke clearly to the needs of students who attend college. Specifically, there was reference to the university needing to provide financial and co-curricular support for students. It was not clear, however, whether the primary focus on these needs was to increase the number of students who decided to attend the university or to address retention as there was no commensurate increase of retentive or persistence-related resources along with the increased enrollment efforts. Admission policy allows for increase of enrollment, policy efforts related to financial aid support lends to increased enrollment; however, there is no clear policy that describes a clear, effective, and sustainable process for supporting the persistence of students. Administrators understand that there is financial need, additionally they understand that there is need for academic and co-curricular support once admitted; however, the lack of a streamlined process for support lends to practitioners leaning on a "pick-and-choose" or "a-la-cart" method of providing students with sufficient academic support.

At the time of this study, a task force was pulled together due to recognition that student support insufficient based on the student profile of the university. The task force findings recommended a realignment and restructure of staffing and departments; however, there was no

clear approach to creating a support matrix that aligned with the admission process for the university.

**Theme 6 (Sub): Students Are Falling Through the Gaps.** Maybe most surprising was finding that academic advisors were not trained to address the specific needs of academically at-risk students, and that data to assess the effectiveness of some student success programs were being manipulated to show they were working; however, a more holistic review of the data showed a counter narrative. It was this revelation that was the impetus for the creation of the aforementioned task force.

**Theme 7 (Sub): Access Without Success.** There were numerous ways to be admitted the university. Referenced as well were tools available for academic support; however, when mentioned, there was an err of doubt in the effectiveness of those tools. As an example, there is a mechanism in place to help detect academic risk factors, the respondent did not know of any programs that were in place to then support those students. Despite their understandings of the admission process and lack of an associated stream-lined student support matrix, the fundamental belief of the practitioners I interviewed was that if admitted to the university, any student had to 7 potential to be successful. Believing this, practitioners used their knowledge and individual understanding of university resources to support students as best was possible. While availability of resources varied and knowledge of those resources varied, the respondents' resolve in supporting students was consistent.

The routes for admission were present and plentiful in the form of financial aid and multiple methods of admission; however, the student support matrix for persistence was wanting.

## **Discussion and Implications**

In my second major finding, lack of context regarding policy creation yields a lack of a student support matrix, there was sociopolitical benefit created through being able to use monikers that denote being inclusive to all or “most diverse university in the SEC”. Williams and Clowney (2007) observed four driving forces that contribute to higher education institutions increasing their attention to diversity: (a) legal and political dynamics, (b) changing demographics, (c) rise of a postindustrial knowledge economy, and (d) persistent societal inequities. These four motives for change were in alignment with the needs and wants of the Institution’s agenda. Therefore, it is not surprising when, despite creation of legislation and policies such as the Civil Rights Act, HEA of 1965, Brown v. Board of Education, or institutional diversity action plans, disparaging experiences for students persist. In these ways, the institution has benefited regardless of the shortcomings of the APVD and its implementation.

Despite the implementation of open enrollment policies within higher education, there are implementation gaps limiting equitable access to and through postsecondary education for systematically marginalized populations of students. By understanding how higher education policies impact diversity efforts and critically assessing the actual beneficiaries of these policies, policymakers and stakeholders can begin to address how policies thought to help, actually cause inequity and disparities. Through this study, I addressed how the admission policy in the State of Mississippi was constructed, how the case study institution adopted or interpreted the policy, and how some administrators at the university enacted the policy. Based on these insights, I provide key implications and recommendations for practice, including creating a student profile, ways to rethink policy implementation, and creating a student support matrix.

### ***Higher Education Policy Implementation Lacked Critical Investigation of Effectiveness***

Federal and state policy creation and implementation related to access to postsecondary institutions has seen substantial changes. This fact is evident in policies such as the Morrill Land Grant Acts, Plessy vs. Ferguson, Brown v. Board Education, the HEA of 1965, and United States v. Fordice. The consistent thread between these court findings and legislation is that policy change was the result of sociopolitical pressure. In my study, I found that *Minutes* (BOT, 1992) did not detail the reason or purpose for the implementation of the APVD. Rather the only intention for its implementation was what could be inferred from timing of the APVD policy. The addition of APVD to the admission policy ran in tandem with the US v Fordice ruling. Through my review of literature, I found that every groundbreaking higher education policy had a similar connection to a sociopolitical issue. What is more, none of the policies addressed the core issues of systemic marginalization and access disparity in education. Therefore, another policy had to be created. Brown v. Board of Education established that segregated education was unconstitutional, but with virtually no strategy to promote desegregation and educational equity, the HEA of 1965 was implemented to create federal financial aid programs, increase state funding for higher education, and increase institutional funding for research and development, which led to the expansion of institutions and their enrollments (Lavin, 2000). This federal legislation provided mandatory impetus for institutions to address their admittance process for underrepresented populations; however, it provided no guidance on to ensure the colleges and universities provide support and resources for students who previously encountered extreme barriers in attempting to access the institution. The approach to creating higher education has remained the same as traced through legislative history as noted in Figure 3. What was lacking, consistently, was critical investigation of the impact of these policies. This too is

evident in the findings of this study. It was important to assess the impact of policies because, despite their use as a tool for increased access, the open enrollment model had not been sufficiently studied at a 4-year public institution. While there has been extensive study done at 2-year colleges, there had been only one study done at a 4-year private college that received funding from the Ford and Carnegie Foundations (Ebersole, 2010). Moreover, this study was conducted twelve years ago, and it was past due time to study the impact of open enrollment at a four-year institution. My study adds to the literature in that it provides an in-depth view of open enrollment implementation at a 4-year public land grant university. Additionally, this study calls into question the large claims of access equality that have been espoused as purpose to continue using open enrollment. Prior to this study, there was no research done to determine the effectiveness of open enrollment nor its true intent.

**Implementation of Policy.** To effectively investigate the impact of admissions policy, I had to determine when, why, and by whom the policy was created. Through reviewing the *Policies and Bylaws* (BOT, 2017), I found that the cited date of implementation for APVD was May 1992. After review of the meeting minutes of BOT, I found it was during the May 1992 meeting that the BOT created the APVD admission policy. In similar fashion of how higher education policy has been implemented, the admission policy and the construction of academic support resources were left to the interpretation of the university. The disconnect between policy creation and implementation is a common phenomenon found in previous studies conducted by Astin (1971), Bell (1980), Smith (1995), Capt (2013), Kelley (2018), Lavin (2000), and others. Each of these researchers and philosophers spoke to the creation and implementation of open enrollment policy, *Brown v. Board of Education*, HEA, and the Equal Protection Act. Despite different topic areas, all their studies spoke to the fact that the policy was created without using

data and that the policy implementation, in guidance and in practices, did not address root cause of access disparity. There was no study conducted into best practices to support the admission process adopted by the BOT. There were no specific supports established at the time of the creation of the policy. The *Minutes* (BOT, 1992) did not denote reference to methods of enrollment or understanding of best practices related those methods. The utility of the APVD policy Green University was unclear because university administrators were more aware of the needs of the students that attended their university and would enact the policy based on their expertise. This raised questions about the effectiveness of policies, specifically, what other resources and people need to be in place to enact policies so that they have the intended impact. In his article “Critical considerations for enacting student success,” Taylor provides perspectives for consideration by university stakeholders and decision-makers. He posits, in the article, that as university stakeholders gave recognition to the lack of progress regarding student success, there was an emergent concentration on “how student success practices are implemented,” (Taylor, 2022,p. 13). This followed the recognition that continued student success disparities existed because of the gap in translating research into practice (Taylor, 2022). Taylor notes that this change is necessary due to intricate nuances existent in “higher education institutions and the overlooked labor of those navigating these complexities as they work to enact student success commitments” (Taylor, 2022, p. 13). As an example, administrators interviewed for this study constantly noted that there was an overwhelming need for additional academic support for students admitted to the university through the APVD. Yes, a policy exists to increase the accessibility of students to an institution; however, this is mooted when there are not comparable student success resources in place to support those students admitted via the increased access pathways.

A primary finding of my study was that a lack of context around policy creation yielded a lack of a student support matrix. While practitioners, individually, would do their best within the scope of their institutional knowledge to support students as awareness of individual student needs came into focus, there was prescribed structure or framework for supporting all students. Open access admission models only work there is a complete formula for student success from admission to graduation: student support matrix. Lorenzo (1993) noted that the early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the creation of junior colleges to create education opportunities for students from low socioeconomic statuses. Lavin and Hyllegard (1996) found that open admission policy, specific to Black and Hispanic students, had benefits of increased degree attainment and financial growth in comparison to those Black and Hispanic students who did obtain a degree. However, Reitano (2003) found that access and persistence disparity persisted among Black and Hispanic students when compared to their White counterparts. According to Traub, et al. (2017) racial disparity has not subsided in higher education by simply expanding access. In fact, the average White student is 7.2 times wealthier than Black students and 3.9 times wealthier than Latino/a students who attended college. The importance of contextual factors, of opportunity, time, and information and their interdependent relationship in college choice and pathways must be considered in the context of post-traditional students, reentering as well as highly mobile college students, and open admissions institutions (Iloh, 2018). This according to Iloh (2018) is the reason “Black and Latino students are underrepresented at the nation’s most well-funded and well-resourced selective four-year colleges and universities but overrepresented at more open-access and under-resourced 2-year colleges” (p. 228). These researchers’ studies, jointly, spoke to how the lack of student-specific support undermined equity efforts. Likewise, what was clear

was that a lack of understanding or knowledge of the historical context that led to APVD existing led to a lack of effective supports for admitted students.

In alignment with Capt (2013), increased support was primarily monetary for students admitted to the university through AVDP; with a noted absence of comparable academic supports or guidance provided to ensure that institution was equipped to provide the needed resources for admitted students. Capt (2013) spoke to this phenomenon in his study, noting that although the aim of the HEA of 1965 was to increase equitable access to education by increasing financial resource availability, previous and current enrollment trends have raised question about if financial supports improved equity among college-going students. Legislation directly aimed at impacting educational equity have increased access to universities; however, these policies fall short in addressing students' needs at the university (Capt, 2013). This study helped illustrate how policy creation from the BOT led to expanding the accessibility of Mississippi universities, and university provisions decreased financial barriers to access, but no policy changes or financial provisions were made to increase resources to support persistence. In their report, Soares and Mazzeo offered perspectives to detail the higher education environment. "As customers, America's students are not now ready to fully and successfully participate in and manage their postsecondary experience" (Soares & Mazzeo, 2008). On the other side, they discussed how funding resources have decreased atop adherence to policies and systems out of sync with the current student population have left postsecondary institutions are not now student ready. "As suppliers, postsecondary institutions are not fully ready to deliver quality, flexible education that leads to college and career success" (Soares & Mazzeo, 2008). Inviting students to attend an institution not set to support those students academically is egregious educational malpractice.

Through the study, I found that alternative pathways for admission were created based on students' application materials, as opposed to basing admission off specific University admission requirements. Although alternative pathways were created, alternative support systems were not. This also begs the question of the relationship between admissions decisions and student success strategies. To disregard the latter is to set a student up willingly and knowingly for failure. Astin (2017) states that "open-access state systems mask an important truth about American postsecondary education: the opportunities available to students with differing levels of academic preparation are far from equivalent" (p. 22). In his article, Astin (2017) makes the argument that traditionally resources have been disproportionately invested to favor students that with the highest levels of academic preparation. He proposes that if these and related methodologies continue, higher education will continue to lamely address the issues that perpetuate an inequitable society.

Furthermore, this type of educational negligence suggests that creating multiple admission pathways is not for the benefit of the student, rather, the institutional admission goals of the time at the time. Taylor (2022) details that the student success conversation is constant and the attempts to get it right have been piecemeal to the extent that there is building discussion around "how higher education institutions should be held accountable and to who [regarding] students' success before and after college" (p. 12). This study both exposed policy lineage and purpose while highlighting methods of correction. Though Taylor (2022) detailed that student success efforts have seen inconsequential progress in bettering the accessibility of postsecondary education or closing disparities, I do believe this study is a tenable the process making sustainable change in higher education policy creation and implementation.

Engaging in DHA helped illustrate how APVD was designed and implemented in response to the state of Mississippi being found in violation of the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment. APVD stayed in place due to the increased profit gained from increased admission. The HEA of 1965 led to the creation of federal financial aid programs, increased state funding for higher education, and increased institutional funding for research and development, which led to the expansion of institutions and their enrollments (Lavin, 2000). Federal legislation provided mandatory impetus for institutions to address their admittance process for underrepresented populations. For some institutions, such as the public state universities in Mississippi, change meant allowing underrepresented students to be admitted to any university they wanted to attend. Astin (2071) argued that academic predictors of success can change for any group of students if they are aligned with the educational objectives of the university. Universities, required by legislation such as the HEA of 1965, increased access to marginalized populations; however, they did not address the organizational structure that would have allowed better success rates for Black and Latino/a students.

Taken by itself, policy changes such as the implementation of APVD or the creation of task force could be perceived as progressive, and in service to a more accessible education system. However, what this study has revealed is a missing perspective when studying policy change or implementation. That is the consideration of historical context. There were multiple times, revealed in my study, where change to the admission process occurred only at a time where the university or the state would be directly benefited. Interest-Convergence asserts that, “the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interest of Whites” (Bell, 1980, p. 523). At any point that a proposed change would impede upon the power or privilege of affluent Whites, the Equal Protection Clause would fail

(Kelley, 2018). Non-address would have led to loss of federal funding and other sanctions impacting the state's operations. APVD was created to make it more possible that any student could be admitted to a Mississippi state institution, which when reviewed in the context of the time in which it was implemented, shows that this change was in concert with a federal lawsuit that found the state of Mississippi out of compliance with the Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

APVD and other policies were more important as symbols of change/commitment, which is perhaps why there has not been much accountability related to the implementation. This study engages concepts of accountability and implementation with higher education policy creation, and how motivations for policy change are reflected in the accountability efforts that follow the policy changes.

### ***Open Enrollment Versus Institutional Choice***

Open enrollment was created as a method for admitting students to college or university in response to a national call for "equity of opportunity" (Lavin, 1990, p. 389). "Grant and loan programs at the federal and state levels, expansion of postsecondary institutions, and special admissions programs targeted to minorities increased enrollment in higher education, especially that of minority students" (Lavin, p. 390, 1990). Where Lavin falls short; however, is that while open enrollment admission policies increased the number of Black and LatinX students, the policies did nothing to address their ability to persist. Additionally, Lavin's work focused solely on community and junior colleges. Moreover, the ways institutions actually implement APVD and other policies is what shapes the student support landscape. From this perspective, institutions have agency in their impact on the student experience. While the review was conducted 12 years ago, the truth remains that Excelsior College used open enrollment and found

great success in the regard of student persistence. Using open enrollment is not in itself a deficit; however, the method of implementation can be a hindrance to student success. Smith (1995) focused on the importance of student choice in attending an institution. Astin's (1971) research spoke to the elitist ideals that undergird egalitarian proclamation without proper support to ensure an equitable educational experience. Tyack and Cuban (1995) simply stated that "education policymaking does not always yield sustainable progress." In this study I found the intersection of each cannon of research. Within this intersection how open enrollment can be effective a four- year public institution, the importance of understanding the connection between open enrollment implementation and student academic choice, and how open enrollment plays in the public agenda.

### ***Making Opening Open Enrollment Effective***

Literature on methods of enrollment exists in two cannons: how it is effective and how it could be a tool for disparaging already marginalized communities of students. Thousands of students gained access to higher education, who, without the creation of this policy, would not have been able to attend college. Additionally, many these students earned degrees (Lavin, 1990). Somewhat oppositely, Astin (1971) found that no matter how the admission process changed to increase the number of students admitted, traditionally resources have been disproportionately invested to favor students that with the highest levels of academic preparation. He proposed that if this continued, higher education would continue to lamely address the issues that perpetuate an inequitable society. In this study, however, I offered that there is a middle ground. This study provided findings that can be used to make open enrollment effective at a four-year public institution.

The only formal study of open enrollment to determine its effectiveness was done by David Lavin in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. Additionally, this research was conducted at the CUNY which is an extensive system of community colleges. Lavin's work highlighted the areas where open enrollment could be a mechanism for access into higher education for traditionally marginalized populations: (1) marked increase in overall student attendance, specifically the freshman class, (2) increase in Black and Hispanic students, (3) widened pathway to baccalaureate, (4) three-fourths of Blacks and Hispanics would not have qualified for admittance. While foundational, these studies do not tell the full story, nor do they provide sustainable methods of open enrollment implementation at an institution outside of a community college. Through my study, I found that utilizing a student profile to determine the needs of students in combination with a student support matrix that provides a framework for providing support for students is the formula to effectively implementing an open enrollment admission model.

**Student Profile.** Deepa Rao (2004) found that the beneficiaries of an open enrollment admission model were typically low achieving, low socioeconomic and marginalized populations of students; however, the specific number of students admitted to college under the pretenses of open enrollment in the regard of ethnic and racial make-up, and/or the gender are statistical figures that did not frequent the research. Additionally, (College Board, 1999) noted that each type of model produces a different student profile. One of the most interesting revelations in this study was finding that the admission policy for the state, and therefore the case institution, had components of all three major types of admission models: holistic, threshold, and open enrollment. While the admission model at the case university was most like open enrollment, there were clear pieces that aligned with holistic and threshold admissions. In my review of

literature, I found that having a mix of admission models was not in itself problematic as university stakeholders should seek to create admission practices that align with the mission of the university (Perfetto et al., 1999). However, what was clear was that for each profile of student admitted, there should be resources equivalent to the needs of that student. It was this need where Green University fell short. My study supported this idea. Green University utilized multiple models of admission, and both the persistence metrics and staff detailed that there was a lack of consistent or sustainable support for students. Developing a student profile or clear picture of the academic and co-curricular needs of students admitted based on their admission pathway, is an essential step in creating a student support framework. The student profile is directly correlated with the admission method.

The concept of a student profile was introduced during my study as the set of socioeconomic and academic needs demographics of the student population at a university. The student profile is a direct result of the admission process. From my study, one of the key findings was that the support matrix of a university needs to coincide with the type of admission model used at the university. The reasoning for this there must be adequate academic, financial, and social supports for the students admitted to a university, regardless of the admission model used. Moreover, when considering the case institution's commitment to be a land grant institution purposed to support the needs of the state's population, understanding the student profile should be a foundational goal. Therefore, considering the primary goal of a land grant institution and the best practice of aligning institutional resources with the method admission, there should be an innate responsibility toward developing a student profile for the purpose of creating an effective student support matrix.

**Student Support Matrix.** Ebersole (2010) discussed how Excelsior College, a four-year private college implemented its admission policy for “anyone with a high school diploma or a GED to be afforded admission” (p. 24). There were several characteristics of the Excelsior College support network discussed in Ebersole (2010) which earned them recognition from the National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education as an open-access college responsible for some of the greatest gains in graduation rates over the past decade. Excelsior College uses different methods for earning college credits and despite increased enrollment, each student has an advisor that makes an individualized learning plan for all students, “areas of deficiency can be satisfied through one of five options: transfer credit from another institution, credit for training, credit for examination, credit by assessment, or coursework at Excelsior” (Ebersole, 2010, p. 25). I found that while my case institution used placement testing and remediation courses, comparable to credit by assessment and credit by examination, students could not earn credit toward a degree through these mechanisms. Therefore, students were paying for these classes and tests with no direct payoff toward earning a degree.

Additionally, Excelsior College provided resources that are expectedly needed by students enrolled at an open enrollment institution: assistance with writing and computational skills, 24-hour tutoring, coaching support for life-family, work, financial, and time management concerns, library support team, and peer networks (Ebersole, 2010). Oppositely, at Green University, the interview participants clearly understood that the students who may have been admitted via relaxed admission metrics may need specialized resources. Atop that, there was a recognition that the university either lacked needed resources or did not have the bandwidth to provide existing resources to all students who needed them. A student support matrix takes into consideration the student profile and creates pathways for success specific to the metrics used for

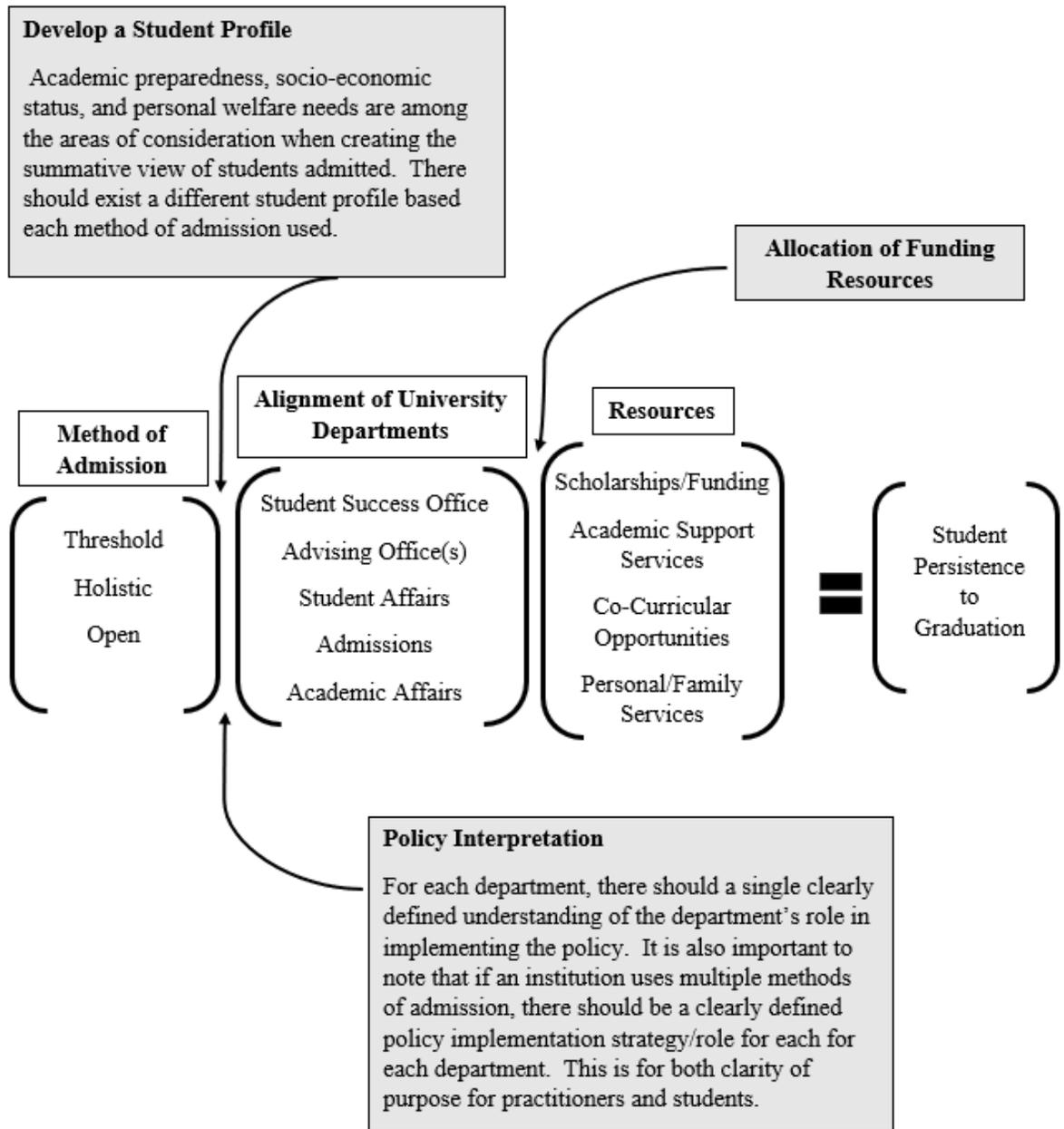
admission. As an example, some of the interview participants noted that some students were admitted with grade point averages lower than a 2.5 or a C+ letter grade. However, it was noted that there were not enough academic advisors in comparison ratio to the number of students in attendance. Moreover, in large part, academic advisors were not trained to support student who entered the university via the APVD pathway. While there was attention given to increasing financial resources in the form of scholarships, there were no specific efforts that detailed how students are connected to co-curricular opportunities.

This study has addressed this gap by exposing that APVD was not necessarily designed with specific students in mind even though it was in response to specific race/class socio-political pressures. Therefore, the next step was to propose the necessity of a student support matrix that aligns with an institution's method(s) of admission.

In mathematics, a matrix is an “array of symbols or expression used to represent a mathematical object or a property of such an object” (Wikipedia. 2022). In a similar fashion are suggested the following elements of student support matrix: method of admission, alignment of university departments, allocation of funding resources, and student persistence to graduation. Figure 2 displays a recommended student support matrix. This figure was a visual representation of how I recommended a student support matrix be structured based on the analysis of the data collected.

Figure 2

*Lawrence Student Support Matrix*



*Note.* Detailed a recommended student support matrix. This figure was a visual representation of how I recommend a student support matrix be structured based on the analysis of the data collected.

There was a pathway for implementing an effective open enrollment admission model at my case institution, and it is by way of using a support matrix informed by the socio-economic, academic, and social needs of the students admitted to the university. Per Ebersole (2010), working to structure academic and co-curricular resources around the needs of the students has allowed Excelsior College to align with the mission the institution.

**Increased Admittance Does Not Mean Much.** Increasing the probability, a student will be admitted to a university does not mean a student has unhindered academic choice. Astin (2017) stated that “open-access state systems mask an important truth about American postsecondary education: the opportunities available to students with differing levels of academic preparation are far from equivalent” (p. 22). Scholars of equity in education argue that choice is a product of the ability to attend college and decide which college he/she wishes to attend. The divorce of these abilities negates a true equitable higher education system. Smith (1995) stated “the “Supreme Court today views Brown [v. Board of Education] as standing for equality of educational opportunity and not as a mandate for integration” (p. 294). Therefore, Brown did not successfully end segregation due to its lack of specification and direction. This lack of detail led states to create nondescript legislation that were overarching, such as open enrollment admission policy.

Evidence of the lack of clarity in policy implementation can be seen in the Brown v. Board of Education decision. Because there was little noted in the Brown v Board of Education ruling to provide clear avenues to end segregation in schools, there was this perforation policy creation. As a result, choice-based policy, such as open-enrollment were birthed in address of ambiguity. As the stimulus for using open enrollment is often rooted in overcoming racism and/or segregation, Smith (1995) posits that there are “dangers inherent in this ‘simple’ approach

that pose a serious threat to school desegregation and integration” (p. 257). Consequently, Smith (1995) recommends that when constitutional requirements lead to states implementing open enrollment programs, it is necessary for stakeholders to beware the possibility of re-segregation. The concept of choice is a nuanced concept to consider in higher education policy implementation. This study both pulled that out this concept and brought to the forefront that simply because a university can admit more students, due to a relaxed admission policy, does not mean that the university is committed to equitable educational experience. Connected to my study, going by the monikers that suggest being inclusive to all or “Most diverse university in the SEC” can, per my findings, only be connected to the number of students and diverse academic needs of students admitted to the university. The university’s lack of a defined support framework for students, the lack of academic and advisor support, the lack of for-credit remedial coursework, and the lack of co-curricular supports show that there was not a commitment to retention or persistence of students admitted via the APVD policy.

Yes, there is a middle ground between the two cannons of research that traditionally noted the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of open enrollment policy. There must be a clearly defined support matrix that includes resources to support the financial, academic, and social needs of students admitted via relaxed admission requirements. Therefore, a successful support matrix requires knowing the student profile of the student body. A more overarching consideration is that there must be a reckoning with the fact that just because the study body is diverse due to an array of admission mechanisms, does not mean that the university is equipped to provide an equitable education experience. This acknowledgement has to happen on the level of policymakers and university administration. This acceptance, while humbling, will ultimately lead to a more effective educational experience for all who are admitted.

### ***Higher Education Policy Changed to Align with The Public Agenda***

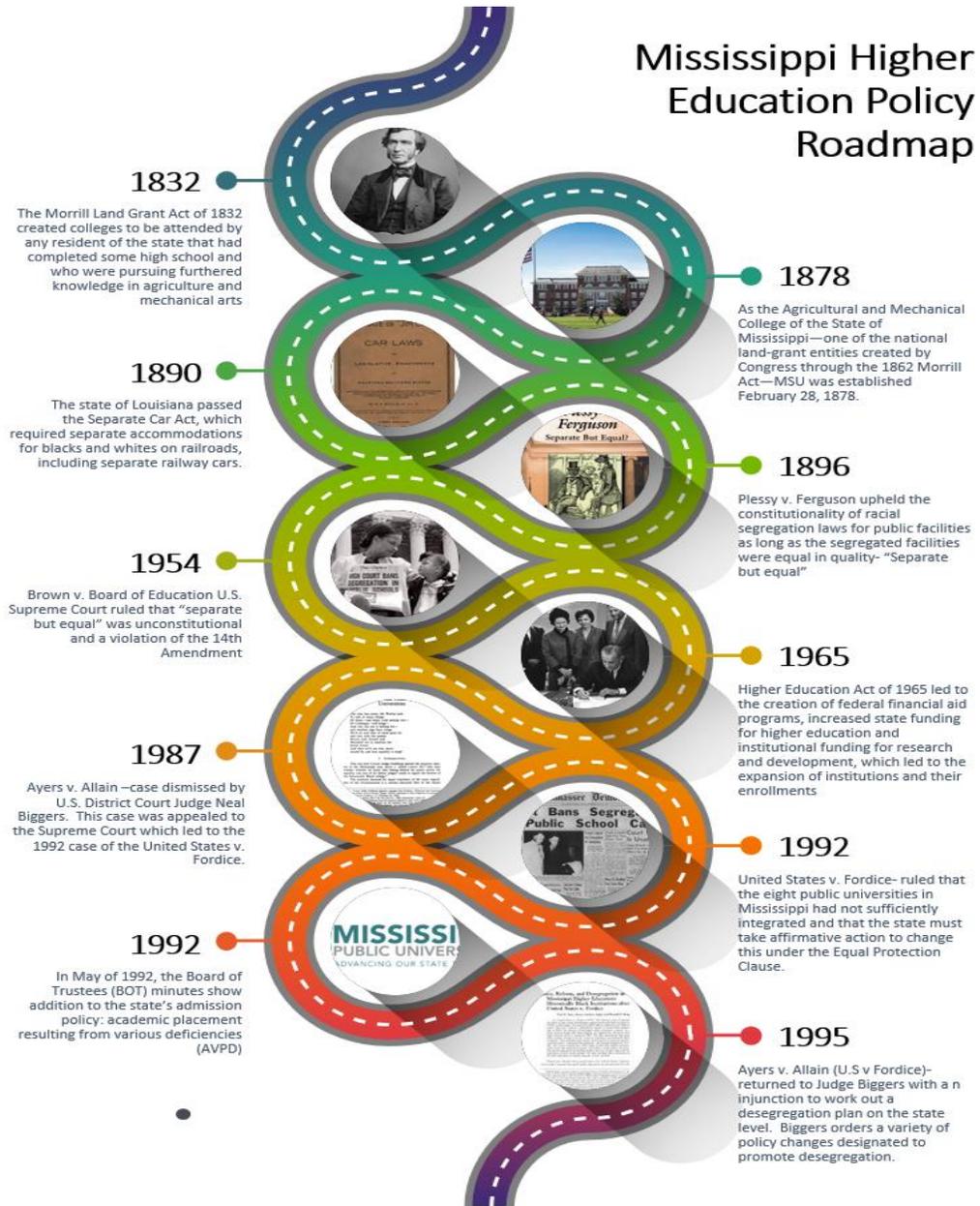
Higher education policy change, both on national and state levels, was uniquely tied to socio-political concerns related to race and equity. *Brown v. Board of Education* found that separate but equal, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, was unconstitutional (Thelin, 2011). The HEA of 1965 increased pathways for access to education, especially in the form of financial aid (Capt, 2013). *United States v. Fordice* found that the state of Mississippi was in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

A map of higher education policy that eventually led to the creation of the APVD admission policy within the state of Mississippi is depicted in figure 3. What I have done through this study is called out the lack of attention to effective policy implementation and the use of policy creation as an appeasement socio-political pressures or concerns. Secondly, by considering policy creation and implementation as inherently discursive, this helped challenged the altruistic assumptions/notions about these policies. By establishing intent, I found that higher education policy is changed to benefit the majority, the public agenda, and any benefit provided to marginalized folks would be attributed to interest convergence. A public agenda, according to Shulock et al. (2017), begins with the public imagining “how best to meet public needs through current, new, and/or modified institutions, collaborations, and instructional approaches” (p. 3). However, public agenda often benefits the majority and/or privileged members of society (Gildersleeve et al., 2010). The discourse surrounding the impact of federal and state legislation on academic communities is found to be increasingly pervaded by public agenda (Gildersleeve et al., 2010). Lastly, putting in conversation the understanding of the historical underpinnings behind the intent of the APVD policy with the early research on best practices for open

enrollment implementation, I was able to find implications for practice on how to better support students and administrators.

Figure 3

Lawrence Mississippi Higher Education Roadmap



Note. A detailed roadmap of higher education legislation and related court cases that led to the court case of U.S. v Fordice.

## **Academic Placement Resulting from Various Deficiencies and Interest**

**Convergence.** Interest-Convergence asserts that, “the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interest of Whites” (Bell, 1980, p. 523). At any point that a proposed change would impede upon the power or privilege of affluent Whites, the Equal Protection Clause would fail (Kelley, 2018). The fact is that the state of Mississippi was going to lose access to federal funding. The discursivity of the creation of the APVD admission policy is highlighted when considering the socio-political context at the time to the policy change. Change was made to benefit the interests of the state stakeholders, and any reciprocal affects, such as increased access, were tertiary to the actual reason for the policy implementation. The importance of influence of public agenda on open enrollment admission policy change at a four-year public university has not been studied until now.

Unites States v. Fordice (1992) found that Mississippi had not sufficiently desegregated and there must be substantial measures taken for the state to follow the Equal Protection Clause; however, the court finding did not specify exact measures to be taken for integrate the post-secondary education system. Each of these trials preceded policy changes that impacted higher education; however, none provided guidance on implementation. APVD was created to widen the pathway for access to state universities and colleges. More specifically, it benefitted the goals of the state of Mississippi and its stakeholders in education, at first glance. Perhaps one of the most jarring revelations of this study was finding that Frank Croswaith, a lawyer who defended a Mississippi school district in their fight to keep segregation laws within their school system, and Governor Daniel Kirkwood Fordice, Jr., who ran on the campaign theme of passionate opposition to quotas and government affirmative-action programs” (Smothers, 1991) were both on the BOT when the APVD addition to the admission policy was added. Considering

the fact that the state was in legal trouble due to its lack of action in creating pathways for equal access to higher education, adding on that the individuals who implemented the policy were outwardly supporters of segregation and pro-racist practice, it is counterintuitive to believe that an access policy put in place to increase the presence of Black students in the university system was done with concern of ensuring that the student would persist post admission. Professor Derrick Bell (1980) posited that the Equal Protection Clause, alone, could lead to equal access to education for Black people. By discovering that the APVD policy was implemented in response to a lack of adherence to the Equal Protection Clause and recognizing that the epistemological foundation of the Equal Protection Clause was interest convergence, this study asserts that there is a new canon of research to consider when creating any higher education policy, specifically those related to admissions and access: discourse-historical policy implementation. Through this study, it became apparent that there is need trouble the intent and, therefore, effectiveness of access policies.

Higher education history denotes how post-secondary education has advanced the goals and initiatives of the larger society; however, less attention was given to how both public agenda and higher education as a system have disparaged some based-on race and/or socioeconomic status. Going back to the purpose of this study to find the connection between admission policy and the phenomenon of access inequality, the missing link has been a disconnect between research and education policy implementation. There were no tangible benefits for ensuring the persistence of students who would ultimately be admitted via APVD. Benefit for stakeholders, from the state to university levels, existed in diversifying the student profile. There was no immediate benefit to be gained from ensuring that the students who could now be admitted had the resources to be successful in navigating the university. This study highlighted the purpose of

APVD have not been extensively researched nor has there been an appetite to do so. Rather, there has been an implicit and explicit overshadowing of policymakers', trustees', and administrators' lack of attention to supporting marginalized populations in their academic goals; more pointedly, their lack of care for supporting Black and African American students.

## **Recommendations for Practice**

### ***Research Approach: Multi-Case Study***

The evaluation of findings produced from a case study is in whether a “holistic view of a certain phenomenon or series of events” is gained, if emerging and inherent characteristics are observed in systems and institutions, and if generalizations can be drawn from review of data from multiple cases and replication (Noor, 2008, p. 1603). For my study, I used triangulation in collecting data from varied sources within the context of one case institution. However, finding divergence and convergence regarding admission policy implementation between that the other universities and colleges governed by the BOT would draw a clearer picture of policy impact. Based on institution type, policy implementation may vary i.e. student support will look different at historically Black university than it does at a predominately White state institution. Completing a similar case study at each of these institutions and comparing the collected data would assist in drawing a clearer picture of both the student profile at each university as well as provide data to begin creating a student support matrix.

### ***Research Topic: Student Profile Creation***

Literature regarding admission practices and methodology were substantial; however, even though critical research studies suggest that understanding the curricular and co-curricular needs of a student are imperative to supporting the persistence of all students, there were little

studies providing guidance on how to conduct data collection of information to create a student profile that could lead to an effective student support matrix. Therefore, admission and access-related literature would benefit from the expansion of research on how to create a student support matrix.

***Research Topic: Individual Education Plans (IEP) or 504 for College***

There is education legislation that requires public schools and secondary education providers to create individualized support for students who attend their schools and have a documented disability that may impede their ability to learn in traditional classroom environments. “The Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) is a plan or program developed to ensure that a child who has a disability identified under the law and is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives specialized instruction and related services” (The Alliance for Access to Computing Careers, 2022). Similarly, a 504 plan is “developed to ensure that a child who has a disability identified under the law and is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives accommodations that will ensure their academic success and access to the learning environment” (The Alliance for Access to Computing Careers, 2022).

As noted by their definitions, neither an IEP or a 504 plan are required to be created a post-secondary education institution. However, as my study has noted that institutional supports should align with the student profile created by the admission process at the institution, it is my recommendation that research be done to determine how universities and colleges could implement a plan to create an IEP for students who are admitted through pathways such as one named, APVD. To ignore the need for an individualized academic plan based on set criterion is, to me, a type of educational malpractice.

## **Limitations**

Generalization of the results from this study to other states and in some cases, institution type, is not likely. However, qualitative research and case study methodology are ideal for generating deep understandings situated in a specific context, rather than generalized meanings across settings (Merriam, 2009). The rich and contextual understandings here can, however, be used to inform practice or similar studies at other, similar institutions (Cresswell, 2012). Case study research can be approached in two ways. A multi-site approach would provide a broader perspective of a phenomenon while a single site approach provides an in-depth picture of a phenomenon specific to that site. This study was conducted using the second approach; however, this research could be expanded by conducting a multi-site study within the state.

## **Personal Reflection**

One of the initial draws to study admission policy was the visible disconnect I saw while working with students. I had observed that the provided support for students' success and institutional metrics of success were not clearly connected. Again, observation of the students with whom I worked with daily consistently showed that both academic and co-curricular support existed up and until the point where there was quantifiable benefit for the case university.

Throughout my study I found evidence that increased access to the institution benefitted the institution, rather than students. While more students were admitted to increase enrollment, and appease calls for equitable access, commensurate resources and direction are rarely provided to support these efforts. Mandates provided by the state governing board, without guidance, leaves the implementation of open enrollment admission policies and the construction of academic support resources up to the interpretation of the university. This could be an

opportunity for institutions with resources to use to support admitted students, and provide staff with sufficient time and support to develop programs to support admitted students. But, the utility of this practice was unclear but given there were no explicit references to support.

For universities that use multiple models of enrollment, like the one in my study, understanding the intricacies of supporting multiple student profiles is imperative. This means there also needs to be assessment mechanisms that follows students admitted via pathways that fall outside of what the institution deems as traditional. Open enrollment without this kind of intentional practice, serves to set students up with little support and increase their chances for failure. This type of educational negligence, reinforces the idea that creating multiple admission pathways is not for the benefit of the student, but instead is designed to meet institutional admission goals.

## **Conclusion**

I conducted a critical analysis of how higher education professionals' enactment of their roles, under open enrollment, impacted the student experience. Historical contextualities that informed the creation process for higher education policy impact the student experience. Specifically, I engaged the open admission policy a public university in the South.

## ***Problem Solving and Policymaking***

Scholars who have studied policy have recognized the lack of research that grounds national education reform which, in their opinion, has weakened clear and effective application of reform initiatives as well as attainment of their anticipated outcomes (McLaughlin, et. al, 2016). By presenting a new methodological approach in leadership and policy development that intentionally dismantles assumptive discourse and create opportunity to expand the boundaries of

understanding, I began the process of critically analyzing policy for the purpose of cutting the tie that binds education to persistent inequities.

Investigating the policymaking process of higher education policy shed light on the impact of policy. With good intention, diversity-specific policies were often created, but their impact lent toward being a symbolic gesture by the university or institutional governing body. The framework used to create diversity-specific policies and normal operational policies have many times laden with assumptions that are steeped in preserving the very system that led to the need of said policies. In the end “change” was ultimately to the benefit of the institution rather than the marginalized populations.

### ***University Admissions Models***

According to College Admissions Models (2019), there were three types of admissions models: open admissions, threshold admissions, and holistic admissions. The open admissions model required no submission of reference letters, statement of purpose or intent, standardized test scores. In fact, the only requirement for admission was the ability to show completion of a high diploma or GED (College Admissions Models, 2019). This model was typically utilized in community colleges and/or universities who seek to provide access to higher education despite level of academic preparedness. For admission into universities that use the threshold model, there was a minimum requirement for grade point average and standardized test scores. Often, there was no requirement for personal statements or letters of recommendation; however, the requirements for admittance were explicitly stated. This model was used commonly in public universities (College Admissions Model, 2019). Lastly, the holistic admissions model was attentive to the idea of selectivity. While explicit minimum requirements may not be published, a general synopsis of the previously admitted class is provided to detail a baseline for likelihood of

being accepted. This model, as opposed to the prior two, sought to look at the entire curricular and co-curricular resume of a student. Personal statements, letters of recommendation, and other criteria may be asked to qualify for admittance (College Admissions Models, 2019).

### ***Taxonomy of Admission Processes***

College Admissions Models (2019) notes three types of admissions: open admissions, threshold admissions, and holistic admissions. Traditionally, a university's admissions process is reflective of the institution's mission and goals (Perfetto et al., 1999). The Taxonomy of the Admission Decision-Making Process is a document that is the product of a task force convened by The College Board in 1998 and 1999. The College Board is an educational association whose focus is to provide support toward "academic preparation and transition to higher education for students around the world through the ongoing collaboration of its member schools, colleges, universities, educational systems and organizations" (Pefetto et al., 1999, p. i). In their document, the task force concluded that the best admission model is one that must be created by a university with consideration of the "mission, resources, and culture," any admission model should be empirically supported, and the university must determine what the "successful student" profile looks like (Pefetto et al., 1999, p. 25). In alignment with the purpose of this study, I wanted to determine if the admission process used at my case institution, also referred to as Green University, coincided or diverged from these recommendations.

Each college and university was created to support different types of educational needs. Students, depending on their needs, will see their educational needs addressed best by varied institutions (Perfetto et al., 1999). The decision on how students are admitted to an institution, which students are admitted to an institution, and its admission model, must be in alignment with the "societal role [the university] elects to play" (Perfetto et al., 1999, p. 5). The description of

this role is usually found in the mission statement of the university. Therefore, it was expected that the societal role of a land grant institution would be different than that of a community college or an Ivy League university. According to the Perfetto et al.(199 9), there was a broad range of philosophical perspectives on who an institution should admit; however, these perspectives could be narrowed into nine general philosophical models as seen in Table 1.

The nine models listed in table 1 each describe frameworks used in determining how students were evaluated for the purpose of college admission. While no model is purely used by any institution, the models represented a “family” of decision models that were used by universities and colleges. Institutions that were part of a particular admission perspective, selective or nonselective, had a “primary selection criterion which derives from its philosophical roots” (Perfetto et al., 1999, p. 7).

Based on the research presented there was nothing that specified that a university “should not” use multiple models for admission; however, the research did note that each type of model produces a different student profile. Therefore, knowing all the types of admission models used by a university would provide insight to the dynamic spectrum of educational needs of student who were admitted into the university. When considering the implications on practice, understanding the intricacies of these variances was imperative.

Understanding the admissions model used by a university gave keen insight into both the mission and goals of an institution. The sum of the socioeconomic and demographic make-up of a student population produced needs for resources: academic, monetary, or otherwise. In conjunction with the process used to admit students, there should be correlating and consistent resources available to support those students through their academic careers. This support should exist to assist students based on their academic and socioeconomic profiles, minimally.

### *Purpose of the Study*

Through this study, I gained a more comprehensive view of how policy implementation impacted students. Critical analysis of the construction and implementation of higher education policies was the research approach necessary to explain problematic assumptions and practices that may account for the continued educational gaps experienced by systematically marginalized populations of students. This is especially important as federal and state policies affecting higher education, like the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1832 to the passing of Brown vs. Board of Education, have posited change regarding the proliferation of diversity and expansion of access (Thelin, 2011).

In their paper, Viennet and Pont (2017) discussed education policy implementation as a complex process. Therefore, it is not necessarily a sustainable practice to implement policy across institutional types without acute attention to institutional context. There is an expanse of conditions that could inhibit the effectiveness of education policy implementation to include: “a lack of focus on the implementation processes when defining policies at the system level; a lack of recognition that the core of change processes requires engaging people; and the fact that implementation processes need to be revised to adapt to new complex governance systems” (Viennet & Pont, 2017, p. 6).

By understanding how higher education admission policies were implemented, and critically examining the impact of these policies, policymakers and stakeholders can begin to address the true problems that cause educational inequity and racial disparities in higher education. Because this task is expansive; I focused on 1) exploring how state open enrollment policies were constructed at the case institution, 2) how open enrollment practices were

implemented by practitioners 3) how do practitioners' practices contribute to or interrupt inequalities that they were meant to address, by conducting a discourse-historical analysis. Open enrollment has been extensively studied at junior colleges, and many of its successes have been detailed through the purview of community college systems such as the CUNY. However, as presented in the literature, the impact of open admissions at four-year institutions has not been intensely engaged despite its use at these types of institutions. This left professionals to draw implications for practice from universities and colleges that are different than the ones in which they work.

Clarity regarding the connection between admission policy and the later impact on the student experience remain unclear and the social phenomena of access inequality remain a salient issue in higher education. Where these issues intersect is where I focused my study.

### ***Emergent Conclusions and Importance of Argument***

Based on the research there were two sides of the argument in response to the impact of open admissions policy at a university. One side was that open admissions provides access to students who may not have been able to attend a university without the allowances set up by this policy such as optional placement testing into remedial courses. Often utilized in community college systems, the process of providing education to all who are willing has increased the number of degree students have traditionally been impeded by socio-economic barriers that impacted their ability for attainment of a college degree (Lavin, 1990).

On the other side of the argument are sentiments that open enrollment was problematic in that it creates space to dilute educational rigor. Opponents of the policy argued that the strain on economic and personnel resources at higher education institutions have a ripple effect on the operational functionality of the university. Academically underprepared students increase the

need for remedial courses as well as an increase in university resources that help students with less cultural capital to navigate the university experience. Therefore, this perspective proposes that these needs are unrealistic to achieve as the number of students attending college increases (Reitano, 2003).

Open enrollment policies and practices have been mostly lauded for their specific impact on providing access to higher education and diversifying the higher education landscape; however, there were understudied elements. Research on the effectiveness of open enrollment has been studied in community college systems. However, open enrollment, while utilized in four-year public institutions, has had little study done to understand its effectiveness and impact in four-year institutions. Critical analysis of these elements and their associated implications could account for the educational access inequities. Even amidst increased policy and practice changes to increase access and retention of students, still disparities persist. This was, of course, amplified for individuals who are systematically marginalized. By gaining a more critical and complex understanding of how open enrollment policies were constructed and the reciprocal enactment of practices, beneficiaries of these policies, policymakers, and university stakeholders can begin to address the true problems that cause educational inequity.

### ***Theoretical Framework Construction***

To further refine and direct my study, I used critical discourse studies (CDS) to analyze my data. Critical discourse studies were theoretical and methodological approaches that shed new light on open enrollment and open access policies.

One approach to CDS, discourse-historical analysis (DHA), aimed to “deconstruct the hegemony of specific discourses by deciphering the ideologies that serve to establish, perpetuate or resist dominance (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p.25). Discourse-historical analysis was ideal to

frame and complicate investigations of open enrollment policy and practices for three reasons. First, DHA focused on interrogating texts (narratives, documents, policies, etc.) and their subsequent performance. Open enrollment practices and policies were inherently discursive in that they were products of written federal and state legislation. Second, DHA provides socio-diagnostic critique, specifically an analysis of the intended and actual effects of discourse. This was especially relevant to open enrollment policies and practices, given the diverging perspectives on their usefulness and impact. Lastly, DHA could yield insights to help inform future practices by interrogating current practices. A DHA approach increased the congruence between various stakeholders' (state legislators, university administration, and students) interpretations and expectations related to open enrollment or root out deficit-laden approaches to the policy enactment that may subvert the original goal of open enrollment efforts.

I used discourse-historical analysis (DHA) to structure the analysis of the data. DHA focused on language as it was used and time and context in which the language was created; therefore, discourse is seen as a social practice: discourse is an action (Forchtner, 2011). Therefore, discourse-historical analysis is uniquely tasked to study policy creation and implementation.

Reisigl and Wodak (2001) described three interconnected concepts of discourse-historical analysis: text or discourse immanent critique, socio-diagnostic critique, and prognostic critique. I used these to align the findings and address the research questions that guided the study. Following, the findings and DHA concepts are delineated according to research question addressed and the related findings. However, as referenced throughout this study, interrogating policy creation and implementation is inherently discursive, as such a valid argument could be

made that each research question and its related findings could be aligned with any of the analytical concepts.

The first research question asked: how were state enrollment mandates enacted at case study institution? This question more pointedly addressed the concept of text or discourse immanent critique. Reisigl and Wodak (2001) stated that this concept of DHA aimed at discovering inconsistencies, contradictions, paradoxes, and dilemmas in the structures internal to the text or discourse. Research question one focused finding the divergence or convergence of policy text for the purposes of policy implementation. Two themes arose from the findings in address of this question. The major finding was Open Enrollment, but Not Really and Determining Intent was a sub-finding.

Determining the intent behind the creation of the admission policy led to questioning some of the access disparities perpetuated despite the implementation of an open access admission policy. Socio-diagnostic critique is concerned with demystifying the — manifest or latent — (possibly persuasive or “manipulative”) character of discursive practices. Using this concept, as the analyst I made use of my background and contextual knowledge and embedded the discursive event in a wider frame of social and political relations, processes and circumstances. On this level, social theories were drawn upon to interpret the discursive events. This indicated that the DHA is inherently interdisciplinary. (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). The next question I posed was how do administrators’ practices contribute to or interrupt inequalities that they were meant to address? The primary finding for this question was Lack of Context Yields Lack of a Student Support Matrix. The sub-finding was there was need to Consider Historical Context behind policy creation and implementation methods.

After interrogating the consistency and inconsistency of policy between the state governing board and the case institution, it would be important to pose the question: how are open enrollment practices implemented by practitioners? In discourse-historical analysis, prognostic critique contributes to the transformation and improvement of communication (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). Having a policy is one thing; however, discovering how the interpretation of the policy happened was crucial to understanding the overall impact of the admission policy. Additionally, understanding the historical underpinnings that contribute to the actual intent of the policy, provided the needed context to make necessary policy adjustments as to upset engrained racism, sexism, and oppressive barriers that impede upon the academic success of systemically marginalized students. For this research question, I found three sub-findings that addressed this question: Participants' Understanding of Student Needs, Students were falling through the gaps, and the institutional ideology lends toward supporting Access without Academic Success.

In both my professional and personal life, I have seen visible differences in how I must engage the world and how the world engages me simply because I am both a woman and African American. Fatigue proliferated by micro aggressive comments and explicit bias saturate my life due to the intersections of my most salient identities. Awareness that my experience is the plight of many people operating from marginalized identities, I believe it is necessary to question hegemonic institutions and create experiences that shed light of the systematically silenced. Because disruption is often seen as a challenge to a normed or powered system, to operate from this perspective is to consistently create space for new ways of understanding for those that may question legitimacy or validity. However, my challenge is those engaging my work will see disruption to “resist and work against settled truths and oppositions” (Williams, 2005, p. 3).

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APPENDIX A

ANALYTIC MEMO: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

## Research Questions:

How are state enrollment mandates enacted at Green University?

How are open enrollment practices implemented by practitioners?

How do their practices contribute to or interrupt inequalities that they were meant to address?

## **Memo Questions: Undergraduate Catalog**

1. What do I think I will learn from this document?

This document will provide information specific to what the university looks at in order for a student to be admitted. Therefore, specifics regarding admission requirements will be detailed in this document. The catalog page is made up of a recruiting page, home page, entrance requirements and general education requirements. I would expect steps for students and families to be outlined in order for them to navigate the admission process i.e. offices to contact, information to be submitted, etc.

It should be noted that I do not discuss the following sections of the online undergraduate catalog: applications, legal residence status, tuition and fees, student account management, financial aid, college and degree programs, [academic opportunities , and student life]- these last two had short paragraphs with no points of contact listed.

2. Which part of my question does this document most align?
  - a. What are open enrollment practices?
  - b. How are open enrollment practices implemented by practitioners?
3. What did I actually learn from this document?

*Home Page:* this page is the website home page for all of the catalogs (undergrad, grad, and archived). It literally provides a brief overview of Green University. It highlights its public, land-grant status. It states that Green University is committed to its tradition of instilling among its students the ideals of diversity citizenship, leadership, and service

*Introduction:* provides broad overview of Green University i.e. location, institution type (comprehensive, doctoral degree granting, land-grant university), accrediting board, academic units, centers and institutes, amount of land (4200 acres, amount of money invested in buildings and grounds (~\$1 billion). Further it timelines the institutions beginnings under the Morrill Land-grant act of 1862. It further details how other federal legislation provided funding to extend the mission of the College: in 1914, the Smith-Lever Act called for instruction in practical agriculture and home economics to persons not attendant or resident, thus creating the state-wide effort which led to Extension offices in every county in the State; and, in 1917, the Smith-Hughes Act provided for the training of teachers in vocational education.

*It list:* the university presidents, vision and mission statements, president's cabinet/officers of the university, academic deans, and BOT members

*Recruiting:* There are specific details about the roles of university recruitment counselors such as them visiting high schools and community colleges. They inform student about admission processes, financial aid, scholarship, housing, and ways to get involved. Additionally, they discuss the requirement for orientation attendance as well as what is accomplished at orientation.

*Entrance Requirements-Freshman:* This page lays out pretty clearly the admission process. It details ‘regular admission’, ‘admission with deficiencies’, ‘home schooled’, ‘special program for academically talented students’, and ‘admission by examination’

There are lines of delineation between how MS residents are admitted vs out of state students. Additionally, there is a qualifier based if a student athlete satisfies the requirements for NCAA standards. There are no specifics with regard to points of contact outside of the Office of Admissions and Scholarships. This department appears to be the only one mentioned via this entire webpage.

*General Education Requirements:* this page outlines course descriptions for general education classes for prerequisites and/or grade requirements. This page pertains to requirements upon being admitted to the university. Essentially, once a student leaves the institution, the requirements, at minimum should be obtained:

Green University baccalaureate-seeking students should demonstrate the following general education competencies:

- Students will write clearly and effectively
- Students will understand the formal elements of the fine art(s), and develop an awareness of both the values and functions of works within their historical and/or social contexts.
- Students will understand the diverse dimensions of human culture.
- Students will understand and use the basic approaches and applications of mathematics and statistics for analysis and problem solving.

- Students will apply science to natural systems and understand its impact on society.
- Students will understand and appreciate human behavior and social structures, processes, and institutions.

### **Analysis Questions**

4. Who created this document?

I found this page on under the online undergraduate catalog. It does detail that additional information should be sought by contacting the office of admissions and scholarships.

5. Why was this document created?

There is not a specified reason; however, as the this webpage is both connected to the undergraduate catalog and titled “recruiting”, my assumption is that it serves as a tool for school counselors and perspective students detailing who to contact about enrolling in the institution.

6. What purpose does this document serve?

- a. State purpose? Information about the recruiting process, what occurs at orientation, entrance requirements, admission processes, and base knowledge about requirements once admitted
- b. Institution purpose? This webpage seems to be catered towards those that assist students in navigating the process of getting into college. I would say that because this webpage is older and not appealing.

Webpages meant to attract students usually have pictures and have an “updated” look.

2. How was this document presented?

a. i.e. guidelines vs. practice vs. law

Practice- this is the process by which the admissions office goes about recruiting students and the purpose of orientation.

Policy- when you click the link that says admission information, there is a disclaimer written: Until further notice, the admission information contained in this Bulletin most accurately describes the admissions policies, regulations, requirements and procedures of the University and the BOT. The University reserves the right to delete, substitute, change or supplement any statement in this Bulletin without prior notice.

b. i.e. format: print? Electronic? Both

electronic format. The page is old; however. At the bottom, it has a copyright date of 2012. Dates have been updated on the actual content.

2. Describe the accessibility of this document

a. What are implications for level and type of accessibility?

I found this page by looking at how university defines its land grant status.

This page connected to the undergraduate catalog, which eventually led me to these multiple connected pages.

2. What depts./ personnel are **stated** to be in charge of document content?

Office of Admissions and Scholarships

3. What depts./personnel may be in charge of document content? **Unstated**

Registrar Office, Orientation programming, financial aid, student success

14. How does this document connect to open enrollment?

Outside of detailing admission steps, this document doesn't seem to be that different than other recruiting tool that may be used by other universities. It does state that recruitment counselors will go to community colleges. Community colleges are the typical institution types that utilize open enrollment. Therefore, based on the admission model, is community college piece may have been specified for a reason.

On the page that details entrance requirements for freshmen, the admission via academic deficiencies mirrors open enrollment; however, it does not specifically say it.

15. Does this document define/reflect of open enrollment?

Only where it notes admission via academic deficiencies

16. How does the document explain its use and implementation process (if applicable)?

It explains the institution's student recruiting process. However, it is not very detailed. This definitely catered toward someone who already has some know-how with regard to how to gain admission to an university. It serves as an overview.

**Summary**

Overall this document was informative. It did align with the BOT policies and bylaws in how it describes the admission process and requirements. Off of this page, there are no descriptors all the departments involved in student success; however, it does give a step by step of how to

become admitted. It presents one central office, admissions and scholarships, as the go to for all information. This does lead me to wonder how well-versed the staff in this office are on varied institutional resources. Are they informing students of resources available based on how the student is admitted or the individual student's background? Because this office is central in the process of getting students the university, should they also be central in connecting students to the resources they would need to then be successful at the institution?

### **Memo Questions: Board of Trustees Minutes May 1992**

1. What do I anticipate learning from this document?

This is the earliest BOT minutes mentioned in the bylaws and policies.

Therefore, I would expect that this document would explain why APVD was created.

2. Which part of my question does this document most align?

What are open enrollment practices?

How are open enrollment practices set by the state governing board?

3. What did I actually learn from this document?

There is no stated reason as to why this document was created. However, the timeline does line up with federal legislation.

### **Summary**

All in all, this document does not detail anything much different than BOT *Policies and Bylaws* (2017). It is interesting to me that the minutes do not detail the reasons behind the creation of a policy. Therefore, it is necessary to connect dots based upon assumptions.

The 1975 case of *Ayers vs. Allain*. Jake Ayers, Sr. on behalf of his son and 21 other students, brought suit against the state of Mississippi. They argued that Mississippi “maintained a segregated higher education system and funded historically black colleges at lower levels than the state’s five predominately white institutions” (Gehring, 2001). This case was dismissed by U.S. District Court Judge, Neal Biggers. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court “under the allegation that the state of Mississippi had failed to dismantle the *de jure* system of segregation in higher education” (Lee, p. 168, 2010). The charge in the case of *United States v. Fordice* (1992) was that Mississippi was violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution (Lee, 2010). This United States Supreme Court case represents the most recent ruling directed towards states that have “historically maintained racially segregated systems of higher education” (Lee, p. 168, 2010). The *U.S. v. Fordice* case found that “Mississippi had not sufficiently integrated the state and must take affirmative action to change this under the Equal Protection Clause” (*United States v. Fordice*, 1992).

Due to other research I have done, this document serves as the glue between federal legislation and BOT’s admission policy. Due to when it was created and the political climate of the time, it is fair to say that this policy was created in forced response to the state of MS not adhering to the Equal Protection Clause.

### **Memo Questions: BOT Policies and Bylaws-Section 600-Student Affairs and Admissions**

1. What do I anticipate learning from this document?

This section will explain in detail the admission process per the requirements of the Institution of Higher Learning governing board. Additionally, there will be some areas of

consideration based on the different types of universities. As this is a policy manual, I think there should be steps and likely repercussions with regard to implementing the policy. Some sort of responsibility matrix would likely be a part of the section (who is in charge of making sure the policy is followed)

2. Which part of my question does this document most align?

What are open enrollment practices?

How are open enrollment practices set by state governing boards?

3. What did I actually learn from this document?

This document clearly outlined the process for admission: requirements and the different types of admission. Additionally, the section details the BOT minutes that led to the creation of all the admission requirements. Section 602: Freshmen admission requirements for university system institutions. This section details how the types of admission processes to include: full admission and academic placement resulting from deficiencies. The only information that I was not anticipating was that a student, even though they may not have initially met the full admission requirements could still be admitted. This occurs after a review of the submitted materials: high school performance (not relegated to gpa), ACT, placement testing, special interests and skills, and other non-cognitive factors. This type of review is similar to that of a holistic admissions process. My research focuses on how higher education policy impacts disparity. I am interested to understand more thoroughly the impact of an admission policy that intertwines open, threshold, and holistic admission practices. With varied methods of admitting students, does the university have the resources to support students admitted my these very different pathways. How do practitioners support students effectively who are admitted via multiple pathways,

particularly if they are unaware of the qualifications that allowed to be admitted to the university.

Additionally, if a student does not take the ACT, they could be admitted via this review process because it does not require the student to submit ACT scores. Therefore, I wonder if this admission process is not only to assist in access for students with academic deficiencies, but also for students who are financially unable to take the ACT.

There was no differentiation between types of institutions on how to implement these admissions practices. Additionally, there were no specific details on how to support both retention and persistence. It appears that this is left to the interpretation of the university. I am not sure if this is a good practice or not; however, I do feel that there needs to be support mechanism that follows students submitted via pathways that fall outside of what the institution deems as traditional.

### **Analysis Questions**

4. Who created this document?

BOT

5. Why was this document created?

Details the admissions process for the universities that fall under the governance of BOT

6. What purpose does this document serve?

a. State purpose? Admission of students that is consistent across all universities. There is also a vigor to admit students that are MS residents (this is evident via the multiple pathways to enter the college).

b. Institution purpose? Not specified

2. How was this document presented?

a. i.e. guidelines vs. practice vs. law

Policy to inform practice

b. i.e. format: print? Electronic? Both

PDF document

2. Describe the accessibility of this document

Accessing this document was relatively easy. One would need to know the governing structure for universities in the state in order to search for this document.

a. What are implications for level and type of accessibility?

Having cultural capital as it relates to institutional structure is a privileged position. It is likely that those being admitted via the mechanisms that we are discussing may not be aware of this structure.

2. What depts./ personnel are **stated** to be in charge of document content?

BOT is responsible for this document; however, there is no other stated offices in charge of the implementation of this information

3. What depts./personnel may be in charge of document content? **Unstated**

Office of admissions, enrollment management

14. How does this document connect to open enrollment?

Per the descriptors of open enrollment, the policy has resemblance. The piece that separates it merely from holistic enrollment is that there is a year long academic program associated with being admitted to the university via the admission with academic deficiencies

15. Does this document define/reflect of open enrollment?

Yes it does. It not the same because there are requisite requirements outside of a high school diploma

16. How does the document explain its use and implementation process (if applicable)?

It lays out clearly the requirements of admittance, the types of admittance.

### **Summary**

A few things that stick out to me are that this admission process is structured to admit as many students as possible. This is the only reason I can rationalized the multiple ways to be admitted. Additionally, the APVD is meant to increase access for MS residents. However, there is a caveat mentioned that would allow an individual university to allow out of state residents the ability to admitted via APVD.

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Multiple Models of Enrollment (MME), Consistency (CSY), Lack of Historical Context (LHC)

*Research questions:*

1. How are state enrollment mandates enacted at case study institution?
  - a. What are open enrollment practices?
  - b. How are the open-enrollment practices set by a State Governing Board?
2. How are open enrollment practices implemented by practitioners?
3. How do their practices contribute to or interrupt inequalities that they were meant to address?

*Protocol*

5. What is the scope of your work in relation to the admission of students to your university?
  1. Not really directly with
6. Could you describe the processes for admitting students? (MME) (CSY) (LHC)
  1. Who are the major decision makers?
  2. What departments are central to this process?
7. How is your work impacted by students admitted with full admission i.e. initially meeting the university's minimum entrance requirements? (LHC)
  - a. How much/little are these students recruited?
8. How is work impacted by students admitted who do not initially meet the university's minimum entrance requirements? (MME) (CSY)
  1. How much/little are these students recruited?
9. What does support look like for students admitted who do not meet the requirements for regular admission? (MME) (CSY)

1. What are the supports for these students?
  2. How are students connected to these resources?
10. From your perspective what roles do admissions play in student success? (MME)  
(LHC)
11. How would describe your university's role in achieving that purpose? (LHC)
1. How could your university improve in achieving that purpose?
12. What metrics do you see are important in determining admission to the university?  
(MME) (CSY)
13. After a student is admitted, how does your office support that student based on  
academic needs? (CSY)
14. For which students do you provide the best academic support? (LHC)
15. For which students could you do better at providing academic support? (LHC)
16. From your perspective, what is your institution doing to improve academic  
support/service to students? (LHC)
17. What are the benefits of the admission processes your university uses? (MME, CSY)
18. What are areas of the admission process that could use address or reconsideration?  
(MME, CSY)
19. Of all the things you have shared today, what would you reiterate as the most  
important to understanding impact of admissions on your work at your institution?

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH FOR EXEMPT  
RESEARCH

**IRB Approval Number:** IRB-19-462

**Title of Research Study:** Mapping Institutional Policy Landscape

**Researcher(s):** Dr. Eric Moyen, Mississippi State University (Advisor); ShirDonna Lawrence, Mississippi State University (Investigator)

**Study Information:** We seek to understand the relationship between higher education policy and the perpetuation of access disparity. Connectedly, we want to understand how the implementation of higher education policy impacts the experience of marginalized students. To begin to address this broad topic, we analyze state governing board policies related to enrollment as a part of the investigation and conduct a socio-diagnostic critical discourse analysis on the implementation of admission policy at one institution in the state of Mississippi in order to understand the overall impact of the policies' implementation on the student experience.

**Procedure:** The research procedure will be a recorded 45-60-minute virtual interview that will include questions about your job, general responsibilities, and university experiences. If you are willing to participate, please respond with a time during the next two weeks for which you will be able allot 45-60 minutes for an interview.

**Questions:** If you have any questions or would like to participate in the research study, I can be reached at 256-651-5573 or [shirdonna-lawrence@uiowa.edu](mailto:shirdonna-lawrence@uiowa.edu).

**Voluntary Participation:** Please understand that your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of

**benefits.**

**Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.**

If you decide to participate, your completion of the research procedures indicates your consent. Please keep this form for your records.

\*The MSU HRPP has granted an exemption for this research. Therefore, a formal review of this consent document was not required.

Research Participant Satisfaction Survey

In an effort to ensure ongoing protections of human subjects participating in research, the MSU HRPP would like for research participants to complete this anonymous survey to let us know about your experience. Your opinion is important, and your responses will help us evaluate the process for participation in research studies. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/M5M95YF>