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Aligning K-12 and higher education: Using an intersectional approach to identify student preparation factors present upon college entry

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ALIGNING K-12 AND HIGHER EDUCATION:
USING AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO IDENTIFY STUDENT
PREPARATION FACTORS PRESENT UPON COLLEGE ENTRY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Counselor Education

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts

by

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ABSTRACT

ALIGNING K-12 AND HIGHER EDUCATION: USING AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO IDENTIFY STUDENT PREPARATION FACTORS PRESENT UPON COLLEGE ENTRY

by Edgar Martinez

The purpose of this study was to examine factors that were present in incoming college students that pertained to the connection they had with those in academic support roles, both during high school and upon college entry. The data for this study were collected using a survey containing closed- and open-ended items related to students' sense of belongingness and connectedness within their high school and college settings. A total of 113 San José State University undergraduate students completed the survey. The findings indicated that students' attributed their motivating force for succeeding in high school and reaching college to their teachers. In college, students' sense of belonging was closely connected to their level of involvement in clubs and sports. In addition, the activities students participated in served as a means to connect with their peers. College students felt a sense of belonging if they had friends. The results suggest that development of relationships to others is related to students' increased sense of belongingness and connectedness within high school and college settings. There is a need to have a space to develop those human connections on high school and college campuses in order to increase students' educational pursuits.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I: Introduction.....	1
Problem Statement.....	1
Purpose Statement.....	2
Research Questions.....	2
Definition of Terms.....	3
Assumptions.....	4
Significance Statement.....	4
CHAPTER II: Literature Review.....	5
Factors that Impact Student Development in K-12 Education.....	5
Educational inequalities for ethnic minority students.....	5
Stereotype threat.....	7
Low socioeconomic student characteristics.....	8
Factors that Impact Students' Transition from High School into Higher Education.....	9
High school preparedness.....	9
Intersectional approach to student persistence.....	12
Social capital.....	13
Humanistic Interventions & Approaches that Support Success for First Year College Students.....	14
Academic success courses.....	15

Remediation courses.....	16
Culturally relevant teaching.....	16
Cultural role modeling.....	17
Community cultural wealth framework.....	18
Critical reflection through personal narratives.....	18
Force field analysis of college persistence.....	19
Connectedness.....	20
Summary.....	21
CHAPTER III: Methodology.....	22
Participants.....	22
Instruments.....	23
Connectedness survey items.....	24
Open response questions.....	26
Demographic questionnaire.....	27
Procedure.....	27
Data Analysis.....	28
CHAPTER IV: Results.....	29
Culturally Relevant Teaching & Cultural Role Modeling.....	29
Quantitative results.....	29
Student/Teacher interaction.....	30
Student/Role model interaction.....	32
Learning environment connection.....	33

Qualitative results.....	33
Interest in relation to future academic success.....	34
Interest in relation to personal life/development.....	35
Higher Education Belonging.....	35
Quantitative results.....	36
Peer interaction.....	37
Institutional connection.....	38
Qualitative results.....	40
Belonging to the campus community.....	40
Disconnect to the campus community.....	41
CHAPTER V: Discussion & Conclusion.....	43
Discussion.....	44
Limitations.....	45
Research Implications & Recommendations.....	45
Conclusion.....	47
REFERENCES.....	48
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Inventory.....	51
Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire.....	53
Appendix C: Informed Consent Form.....	54

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Ethnic/Racial Comparison: San José State University v. Study.....	23
Table 2: Content Validity as Measured by the Inventory.....	26
Table 3: Culturally Relevant Teaching & Cultural Role Modeling Frequencies.....	30
Table 4: Higher Education Belonging Frequencies.....	36

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Item 1: In high school, I trusted my teachers to have my best interest in mind.....	31
Figure 2. Item 3: In high school, I felt that my teachers understood me as a person.....	31
Figure 3. Item 5: I have someone with a similar value system that I look up to and/or admire.....	32
Figure 4. Item 7: I have a role model that I can relate to on a personal/professional level.....	32
Figure 5. Item 9: My peers and I were treated with respect in high school.....	33
Figure 6. Item 2: I can easily relate with other students in my classes.....	37
Figure 7. Item 6: I can talk to my peers about problems I am having.....	37
Figure 8. Item 8: It is hard for me to get along with other students at <i>San José State</i>	38
Figure 9. Item 4: I feel like I belong at <i>San José State</i>	39
Figure 10. Item 10: I can be myself at <i>San José State</i>	39

Chapter I: Introduction

The K-12 education system is not adequately developing students in a manner that enables academic success at the higher education level (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013). The passage from K-12 to higher education, therefore, must be specifically addressed in order to give incoming college students the tools needed to succeed. The combination of academic unpreparedness and the rigors associated with college life and learning make higher education institutions a setting where incoming students can easily falter and fail to persist. The highest possibility of student dropout in higher education is in the first year of attendance and this is partly due to the incongruence between a student's expectations and the realities of the demands set forth by the institution (McGrath & Burd, 2012). The problems associated with higher education attrition stem from the complex array of students' personal, structural, and institutional attributes. The only way to address such a complicated and individual student profile is to use an intersectional approach. This method affords those in student support positions to use a diverse set of procedures and interventions in order to adequately support student persistence. In conjunction with an intersectional approach, higher education institutions can benefit from the development of connectedness to the college campus and the members of that community. Creating a sense of belonging enables students to see themselves as participating members of their school.

Problem Statement

Specialized attention needs to be given to the first year of college in order to successfully transition students into their new setting. The concern is further highlighted

by the fact that “estimates suggest that only one-third of high school graduates finish [high school] ready for college work” (Bettinger et al., 2013, p. 93). The lack of college preparation combined with the high level of student dropout in the first year give merit to supporting this student population in the first year of attendance.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to join the collective strengths of K-12 and higher education research in order to develop a full-rounded holistic profile of students entering college for the first time. By surveying incoming college students within their first year of attendance, higher education institutions can best identify the skills they possess upon entry to their institutions, and “can identify the forces that produce either academic achievement and persistence or academic failure and attrition” (Anderson, 1985, p. 44). The data collected as part of this study will be used to shed light on student characteristics that have the potential to inhibit student success. With this information, higher education institutions can knowledgeably support student persistence in a humanistic approach that takes into consideration students’ eclectic experiences.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

- Are students entering higher education institutions prepared to succeed?
- How do experiences in K-12 education affect a student’s college experience?
- What type of support do students receive in their K-12 education settings that have a positive impact on their academic journey?

- Is the university setting creating a space where students can connect to the campus community?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of carrying out the present research, this study used the following definitions:

Attrition: Dropping out of a college or university

Connectedness: The manner in which students feel a part of the university community

Higher Education: Four-year college and/or university

Holistic: Taking into consideration a person as a whole as opposed to single highlighted attributes

Intersection/Intersectionality: The theoretical space where different forms of identity meet in order to create a distinct set of characteristics

Intervention: Plan or program of action

Inventory: Measurement tool used to collect information

K-12 Education: Grade levels, kindergarten through twelfth grade

Metacognition: Thinking about how one thinks

Non-Cognitive Factors: An individual's internal elements that contribute to one's conception of self-perception, motivation, and/or worldview

Persistence: In reference to higher education, making it through the college experience to graduation

Postsecondary Education: Four-year college and/or university

Secondary Education: High School

Assumptions

In order to conduct this research, the study assumed the following:

- Students come into college with experiences that are specific to their own personal lived understandings.
- With the proper identification and support, all students can be successful in the college setting.

Significance Statement

The purpose of this study was to highlight specific factors that inhibit and enhance academic success. The study focused on how students connected to their high school and higher education institutions. The information collected can benefit those in academic support positions because it allows them to tailor intervention strategies that address concerns about student belonging upon college entry. It is up to higher education institutions to have students feel like they belong to the campus community in order for them to stay enrolled and persist to graduation.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Incoming college students enter a new structural environment when they start their postsecondary education. The tools given to new college students through most of their educational journey fail to address many of the issues and concerns they will face when they enter higher education. Martin, Garcia, and McPhee (2012) state that, “University and secondary school educators recognize many high school students will undertake a postsecondary education but find themselves unprepared for the academic demands once they arrive on campus” (p. 34). By focusing on the myriad of factors that can inhibit fruition in this setting, it can allow students to take a well-rounded approach to succeeding in higher education.

Factors that Impact Student Development in K-12 Education

When analyzing and supporting the first year college population, it is essential to understand the factors with which they are entering their higher education institutions. These students are not blank slates that are only affected by the college upon entry. They bring with them experiences that shape their worldview.

Educational inequalities for ethnic minority students. Ethnic minorities in the American education system face multiple forms of oppression that have the potential to add to the already daunting task of completing school.

Education is not equal in this society, in either access or quality. Socioeconomic disadvantage, segregating social practices, and restrictive cultural orientations have all dampened the educational opportunities of some groups more than others, historically and in ongoing ways. (Steele, 2010, p. 47)

Claude Steele highlights the fact that there are various levels of oppression at play in our education system. This is the reason ethnic minority learners attending American K-12 schools merit attention and involvement. Using a *cultural-ecological* perspective to assist ethnic minority students allows for those in academic support positions to understand why students interact with the educational system in the manner that is characteristic of their cultural background (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Identifying cultural practices within student populations enables educators and those in policy making positions to tailor effective support measures designed to have specific positive outcomes.

Using a cultural-ecological perspective is a vital tool for educators because it aligns the worldview of a student's culture and life at school. This approach is beneficial because there is often incongruence between ethnic minority students' cultural values and the standards set forth by educational institutions.

First, they make the students feel that they have to choose between (1) conforming to the school demands and rewards for certain attitudes and behaviors that are definitely "white," especially the mastery and usage of standard English, and (2) the community interpretations and disapproval of or ambivalence towards those attitudes and behaviors. (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 178)

This student population juggles the demands of the education system with their own cultural values. As a result, these misalignments cause conflict in successfully traversing American schools while still being true to cultural identities. The combination of cultural-ecological theory with additional resources that will be discussed in this paper have the potential to be used to support students from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Stereotype threat. *Stereotype threat* is the clash of societal expectations of individuals with physical manifestations of anxiety and self-doubt that results in real life consequences for students in the education system.

The reality of stereotype threat also made the point that places like the classrooms, university campuses, standardized-testing rooms, or competitive-running tracks, though seemingly the same for everyone, are, in fact different places for different people ... For women in advanced college chemistry, for black students in school in general, for older people returning to school, for white sprinters in elite sprinting, there are stereotypes “loose in the house” that make these situations different for them than for people from other groups. (Steele, 2010, p. 60)

This information implies that students who have been stereotyped as poor performers in education are in fact working with psychological factors that prevent a truly level playing field. The lack of an academic continuum of performance based on race is highlighted by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reading and mathematics scale scores that highlight the fact that twelfth grade Black students score 30% lower than their White counterparts in these domains (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences [IEP], 2014a; U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences [IEP], 2014b). Those in academic support positions who understand the concept of stereotype threat can mediate through the psychological educational disparities caused by this concept. There is a tangible possibility to inhibit the success of ethnic minorities, women, people with disabilities, etc., when confronted with a stereotype of one’s shortcomings (Steele, 2010). With specific consideration to racial minorities, there is a long sorted history of perceived inferiority in the realm of education. This is the setting where stereotype threat has the space to make academic failure a self-fulfilling prophecy for students of color.

Low socioeconomic student characteristics. Coming from a background that does not economically provide support shapes many student perceptions and opportunities available to that segment of the population. With respect to this population, “proportionally fewer students from low socioeconomic groups enter college and persist to graduation than do students from higher socioeconomic groups” (Anderson, 1985, p. 52). The fact that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds attend college at lower numbers has various structural root manifestations that are present in the home, society, and schools. The most recent figures illustrate that only 45.5% of low-income students that completed high school actually attend college, which is far behind the 78.5% of high-income students that attend college after completion of high school (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences [IEP], 2014c). The physical resources that are available to the low socioeconomic student population pale in comparison to students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. In order for low socioeconomic students to reach the heights of college attendance they need to do more in spite of their circumstances.

Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds generally attend inferior schools and have lower academic skills, they must therefore spend more time reading, studying, and preparing for their courses. (Anderson, 1985, p. 55)

Anderson illustrates that there is more that goes into being a student with a low socioeconomic status than just having limited resources. Students have to spend more time preparing academically in order to compensate for their lack of means. As previously illustrated by the IEP (2014c), over half of low-income students do not make it to college. The minority of students that do reach college are met with increased

challenges due to their lack of capital and the extra time needed to devote to their studies. Helping this student population with institutional resources is a basic representation of equity that could assist them to be on par with students from middle and high socioeconomic backgrounds.

Factors that Impact Students' Transition from High School into Higher Education

The switch from high school to college can be the largest structural change students will encounter in their educational career. This is why higher education institutions need to support the first year transition upon entry in order to best help their incoming students acclimate to their new surroundings. The U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences [IEP] (2014e) show that only 72.9% of first-time undergraduate students are retained after their first year of attendance. This information illustrates that attrition is occurring at significant levels in this specific student population. Higher education institutions can empower those in academic support positions to tackle student dropout with individualized assistance by learning more about their students' personal circumstances.

High school preparedness. Higher education institutions are working uphill to respond to the lack of research and critical thinking skills first year college students possess upon the start of their undergraduate career (Martin et al., 2012). The absence of critical thinking and research skills upon college entry places first year students at a disadvantage in their performance capabilities in the classroom.

The present predictors used to assess academic success in college are standardized testing and grade point average. However, there is a discrepancy in these methods of

assessment because they do not give an accurate level of college student success. As Sparkman et al. (2012) have stated, “traditional predictors of student success in college, ACT/SAT and high school GPA, have been shown to account only a modest amount of variance (25%) of student academic performance in college as reflected by their GPA” (p. 642). Based on this information, there is more to academic performance than a numerical representation of a person’s worth based on a standardized test or an aggregate score of grades. It is necessary to gauge and then engage students in critical thinking practices in order to facilitate their performance while in college.

Students come into college with institutional biases that have the potential to create incongruence with their new setting. This is through no fault of the students because they are using the methodological framework that got them to college; “the students usually believe that the relation between high school and college is the same as that between junior high school and high school” (Meiland, 1981, p. 9). The students’ perception of a consistent educational continuum has the potential to create conflict as they attempt to successfully navigate this setting with the skills they possess upon entry. The most significant manner in which educational instruction and evaluation transforms is represented in the type of learning that takes place in the classroom. For the most part, K-12 coursework consists of memorization and regurgitation. However, college coursework has a strong emphasis in critical thinking; “a large part of college work consists of discussing and examining the basis of current beliefs” (Meiland, 1981, p. 10). The landscape of educational knowledge for students is fundamentally altered in college. The teaching and learning structure is now asking students for their analysis of

information. This is in direct conflict to the memorization and regurgitation method that has been prevalent in most K-12 schools. As Bettinger et al. (2013) state, “while adjusting to a new environment, they must simultaneously acquire college-level academic skills” (p. 94). It is apparent with the information provided that students are not entering higher education institutions prepared for many of the challenges presented. It is a matter of concern because, “although all students face challenges in higher education, underprepared students confront more urgent problems, both academically and more broadly” (Bettinger et al., 2013, p. 94). The combination of a complex array of difficulties combined with an urgent need for support illustrates swift and effective identification and mediation strategies.

Currently, the state of California and forty-one other states are working to raise the level of instruction for K-12 students through its implementation of the “Common Core State Standards” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016). In addition to raising standards, there is also a push to have higher education participation in curriculum development in order to create a “college-ready” student population (Higher Education for Higher Standards, 2016). There is highlighted attention to prepare students for college through K-12 policy development. But, at the moment, incoming students are being asked to critically analyze information and give their interpretation of abstract concepts and ideas. The combination of acquiring new learning skills while adjusting to the college setting can cause functional discrepancies in the manner that students operate their new setting. This notion of college unpreparedness is further highlighted in specific student populations, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds. As

Anderson (1985) states, “students from low socioeconomic groups tend to have lower academic skills than students from higher socioeconomic groups” (p. 53). Even within the incoming student population as a whole, there is a necessity to highlight specific student groups that have a higher need for support.

If students do not alter the manner in which they acquire and process information, they have a higher probability of failure since the college workload is profoundly dichotomous to the demands of the high school curriculum (Martin et al., 2012). Upon college entry, students have to be taught how to intake information. While it would be beneficial to address these concerns before college entry, higher education institutions must tackle this issue as it presents itself in the first year of attendance.

Intersectional approach to student persistence. The initial challenge many incoming freshmen face is the acclimation to the college setting. Academics, the institution itself, and the social interactions that make up the college experience are conjunctively being developed in the first year of attendance. In an attempt to understand and tackle concerns that arise during this time period, an intersectional approach is most beneficial since, “several studies indicate that multiple variables appear to influence students to dropout of college including making new relationships, adjusting existing relationships, learning to study, and dealing with independence” (Sparkman, Maulding, & Roberts, 2012, p. 645). An intersectional approach in helping students allows for those in academic support positions to address concerns that range from the academic to the personal. It enables a holistic method of support that takes into account the different circumstances students encounter in their first year of college.

Social capital. In order to adequately serve the student population, components that supplement academics must be addressed. This is made evident by the fact that “while approximately 35 percent of university students depart a university for academic reasons, the other 65 percent leave a university voluntarily for non academic reasons” (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012, p. 483). These statistics alone highlight the need to delve into non-academic forces that make up the college experience. The college experience is complemented by sociological factors that influence persisting through to graduation. Developing positive relationships with peers, faculty, and family during the college experience is critical to positively adapting to the new setting. This is especially true with developing meaningful connections to people on campus, “feeling lonely is a source of discouragement and causes some college students to question their original decision to go to college” (Anderson, 1985, p. 48). The relationships that students develop with the people on college campuses directly translate to how they feel about the institution itself.

A highlighted designation that impacts social capital in college is being a first-generation college student because it comes with a unique set of challenges. There is a lack of institutional knowledge that comes from a family system that is unable to provide college-specific resources.

When parents and family without college degrees form the primary support structure of students in college, there is a lack of experience surrounding the student that may lead to insufficient levels of emotional support or a lack of understanding of the commitment necessary for a student to persist in college. (Sparkman et al., 2012, p. 648-649)

This information highlights a lack of social capital connected to students that come from being a first-generation college student. Students who are in this

circumstance need guidance at the institutional level in order to assist them through the college experience.

Humanistic Interventions & Approaches that Support Success for First Year College Students

Currently there is a wide array of methods to support students in their journey through college. But even with these measures in place, the college student graduation rate at the four-year mark is only 39.4%, and 59.2% at the six-year mark (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences [IEP], 2014d). There is a possibility to increase these graduation rates by combining some of the best features of different interventions and approaches. This section highlights student support measures that span various levels of K-12 education and college. These approaches have the potential to make a positive impact on student persistence at the college level.

A humanistic approach to working with students is at the heart of all the methods stated in this section. In reference to education, this traditional counseling perspective works with the assumption that students are different and require a varied assortment of support mechanisms that can enable success.

The interventions that school counselors provide must, by their very nature, aim to maximize the human and social potential for each individual involved in a given school community. (Villares, Lemberger, Brigman, & Webb, 2011, p. 42)

Supporting students from a humanistic counseling based approach promotes action that is intended to meet personal needs as addressed by the individual. In the example of the Student Success Skills (SSS) program, it is an intervention designed with those principles in mind. It is implemented in a manner that touches on various levels of student support in order to make a positive impact on the largest population possible.

The SSS program is a structured school counseling curriculum and training scheme that equips practitioners with relevant and useful activities designed to support achievement and related school behaviors in students Grades 4 through 12. (Villares et al., 2011, p. 43)

The creation of interventions that tie together the principles of humanistic counseling with a structured curriculum enables those in school support positions to give students long-lasting tools. A highlight of this particular program consists of dual methods of support, including a classroom component and a small-group counseling program (Villares et al., 2011). Looking at different models of assistance allows researchers and practitioners to develop means that have the potential to reach the most students.

Academic success courses. Academic success courses are quite common in the college setting. These courses tackle the myriad of topics that contribute to academic success and persistence including,

...student development; test-taking and note-taking strategies; campus policies and procedures; exploration of different majors; and engagement with faculty members, advisors, and other student resources on campus. In the student development portion, advisors encouraged students to take responsibility for actions; understand personal strengths and weaknesses; discover motivations, values, and learning styles; develop relationships with faculty members, advisors, and peers; effectively manage time; set goals and make decisions; work in teams; discover one's personality type; and explore majors ... They also offered support and the appropriate referrals to student services, such as psychological services, tutoring, and financial aid, when applicable. (McGrath & Burd, 2012, p. 46)

It is common for academic success courses to cover these topics and more. A broad range of topics is meant to cover the full range of possible factors that can inhibit student success. Academic success courses offer a strong template for a model of eclectic student support.

Remediation courses. Students can come into college underdeveloped in certain subjects and remediation courses are designed to help students catch up to the standard level of instruction. Remediation courses have mixed success rates depending on populations, but current research highlights new eclectic approaches that combine different interventions into this one method and it has the potential to increase success rates for college students (Bettinger et al., 2013). Remediation courses have the potential to be a versatile foundation for student support that can cater to specific students and populations. The concept of developing hybrid remediation courses that take into consideration different types of student populations affords the possibility to connect various intervention methods into a unified approach.

Culturally relevant teaching. The concept of *culturally relevant teaching* is derived from the cultural ecological theory component that enables educators to instruct in a manner that connects to the student perspective:

Specifically, culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging of explaining dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right ... This kind of moving between the two cultures lays the foundation for a skill that the students will need in order to reach academic and cultural success. (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 17-18)

As previously discussed in earlier sections of the literature review, navigating both school and cultural systems causes a lack of congruence in the lives of students. Culturally relevant teaching aligns both identities (personal and institutional) into a single perspective that draws the strength of both components in order to make a solid collective effort (Ladson-Billings, 1994). As a resource for student support, this style of teaching

empowers students to make a personal connection to the material. In addition, this type of instruction works to bridge the gap between the student and teacher in order to develop a connection that validates the identity of the learner (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Cultural role modeling. The concept behind *cultural role modeling* is the premise that students can connect to successful members of their community. As Ogbu and Simons (1998) state, “Role models play an important part in student motivation to succeed in school. Role models provide students with an adult to admire and emulate” (182). As an intervention resource, cultural role modeling gives students a template for success. This type of intervention is critical to students who are not well represented in higher education institutions.

The concept of cultural role modeling can also be extended to encompass co-peer mentoring in the classroom setting. The SSS model mentioned earlier in this section empowers students to be active listeners and build skills of empathy amongst students in their classes (Villares et al., 2011). This approach affords students the ability to expand upon their worldview and see that they are not alone in their journey through education. It creates a space where students can share their experiences and develop social capital amongst each other. As an intervention measure, developing those connections helps combat student attrition because “peer support was a significant predictor of second-year retention” (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012, p. 489). The impact students have on each other is a tangible component that has the potential to help students succeed and persist in college.

Community cultural wealth framework. The community cultural wealth framework is *critical race theory's* answer to the deficit point of view non-dominant cultures traditionally possess in the educational research landscape. It affords subjugated communities the ability to use their cultural strengths as a means to traverse the dominant ideological perspectives have traditionally diminished their ways of knowing and doing.

CRT [critical race theory] shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged. (Yosso, 2005, p. 69)

By reframing cultural capital along the lens of community cultural wealth, it relocates cultural practices and perspectives into a realm of resources as opposed to deficit. The critical analysis of students' communities and cultures illustrates that there are many assets and resources that can be seen as pillars of strength (Yosso, 2005). As a guiding theoretical concept, community cultural wealth has a space in the persistence of students who do not yet see the value of their cultural experiences.

Critical reflection through personal narratives. Reflecting upon successes, failures, and challenges enables individuals a chance to make sense of the often times meaningless series of events that is the human existence.

Reflection enables us to correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem solving. Critical reflection involves a critique on the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built. (Mezirow & Associates, 1990, p. 1)

Critical reflection opens the dialogue for the development of effective coping skills and new techniques to self-improve. In addition, critical reflection through the use of personal narratives has the ability to identify instances of success in order to project

them into new settings and build self-efficacy. Mezirow (1990) describes the assimilation of new experiences into previous frameworks of knowledge as *meaning perspectives*. This higher-order schema combined with a metacognitive awareness can afford students the opportunity for personal development if used in an educational context.

As a tool for self-reflection, Cruz (2012) uses personal narratives in the classroom with the practice of the *testimonio* storytelling.

What *testimonio* does best is offer an opportunity to “travel,” positioning a listener or an audience for self-reflection. Under certain open circumstances, a listener or an audience member is given the opportunity to become complicit as an observer and a witness. (Cruz, 2012, p. 462)

In a classroom setting this tool can be used in order for students to learn more about themselves and about others. In addition, this approach also has components of cultural role modeling as students can learn from each other’s experiences. The *testimonio* approach allows students to develop empathy for one another. As previously discussed in this section, empathy empowers students to expand upon their worldview and see their journey through education as a collective endeavor.

Force field analysis of college persistence. The premise of Anderson’s (1985) Force Field Analysis of College Persistence model is to give students a personalized representation of the factors that can either promote or inhibit college graduation. It is broken down by internal and external forces that are either considered positive or negative to a student’s persistence towards graduation. Students interact with this model on an individual capacity in order to illustrate how their multitude of persistence and attrition factors interrelate with each other to identify the components of their lives

pushing them to graduate or dropout of college.

There is seldom a single cause for any human behavior; rather, the causes are multiple and interrelated. We look at attrition as a caused event, yet there is no single factor responsible for it. Instead, a complex mesh of casual factors, forces or obstacles is responsible. (Anderson, 1985, p. 52)

Personal identification of strengths and weaknesses are the outcomes of this educational tool. The benefit of this model is that it can be implemented in the classroom, counseling session, and on a one-on-one capacity with a student support practitioner. The application of this method is specific to the student, so the model can be applied as formally as a handout or even a one-on-one discussion with a facilitator that is versed in the intervention. This approach can benefit incoming college students because they can identify their strengths and weaknesses. Detection of personal strengths in their college career can help students utilize their persistence resources (Anderson, 1985). Inversely, identifying weaknesses can afford students the benefit of addressing factors that could cause higher education attrition. As a resource, the Force Field Analysis of College Persistence model has the potential to assist students understand themselves and give those in academic support positions tangible holistic information that can enable effective humanistic support.

Connectedness

The intent of this study is to identify students with lower levels of connectedness in order to address it within the first year of college attendance. Developing a positive level of connection to one's school and faculty has the potential to improve various factors that contribute to student success, "psychological membership itself may be an important contributor to school motivation, effort, participation, and subsequent

achievement” (Goodenow, 1993, p. 80). This non-cognitive measure is critical to identify and develop in order to assist student with transitioning in to higher education.

Summary

The intent of this chapter is to illustrate the factors educational research has shown to directly inhibit academic success for students at the K-12 and higher education levels. As a supplement to this information, academic support interventions and approaches have shown that there are specific tools that tackle specific concerns. If student success were as cut and dry as one problem, one solution, then academic attrition and educational inequalities would not be an issue that has spanned several decades in literature. The message in this body of research is to illustrate that students are more complex than a single designation of low socioeconomic status, first-generation, and/or ethnic minority. This is why an eclectic model with a humanistic approach fits the need to the problems students are having in the American education system.

The data collected as part of this study is intended to start the process of developing individual student profiles that can provide educational researchers with information needed to identify persistence and attrition factors possessed upon college entry. The overarching goal of this research is to tailor interventions and approaches to meet students’ specific needs so that practitioners can have an informed procedure of support.

Chapter III: Methodology

The previous chapter demonstrated that incoming college students face challenges brought upon by their transition into the college setting. There is a structural need to assist these students to persist through to graduation. Retention of first year college students is a priority due to the alarming rate at which they are dropping out. It is up to higher education institutions to adequately service this segment of their student population. The intent of this study was to gather information of the factors in which these students have connected to their K-12 education settings and upon entry to their higher education institutions. The overarching motive of the data collection process was to gain insight to help develop a personalized practical approach to help this population navigate through the college setting and inevitably reach graduation.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 113 San José State University undergraduate students from four sections of one undergraduate course: EDCO 004: *Personal, Academic, & Career Exploration*. EDCO 004: *Personal, Academic, & Career Exploration* is a general education course commonly taken by incoming freshmen in their first year of college by voluntary choice. The sample consisted of 67 freshmen students, 16 sophomore students, 12 junior students, and 18 senior students. The data from both first and non-first year students were analyzed because both groups at one point were in K-12 education and also first year college students. The questions in the inventory were applicable to all students surveyed.

The participants' self-reported ethnic/racial composition consisted of 31.9% Asian, Asian American, Chinese, Japanese, Korean; 24.8% Mexican, Mexican American, Latino participants; 17.7% White, Caucasian, European Dissent; 8.8% South East Asian, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, Vietnamese, Filipino; 7.1% Black, African, or African American; and 9.7% identifying as more than one race. The participants' ethnic/racial composition mirrored the ethnic/racial composition of San José State University students. Table 1 illustrates the comparison of the study's and San José State University's ethnic/racial composition. The university comparison data were retrieved from San José State University's Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Analytics (2015) website.

Table 1
Ethnic/Racial Comparison: San José State University v. Study

Race/Ethnicity	San José State University (N=32,733)*	Study (N=113)
Asian	32.1%*	31.9%
Hispanic	23.2%*	24.8%
White	19.9%*	17.7%
Black	3.1%*	7.1%
Pacific Islander	.4%*	8.8%
American Indian	.1%*	0.0%
Foreign	12.2%*	N/A**
Other	9.1%*	9.7%***

*Source. San José State University, Institutional Effectiveness & Analytics (2015)

**In study, no data collected to identify "Foreign" status.

***In study, the category "Other" includes students who identified as more than one race.

Instruments

The data for this study were collected using an anonymous survey that measured the connectedness component students possess towards their learning environments, both during high school and in college. The survey consisted of 10 four-point Likert scale items that ranged from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," two open-response

questions (see Appendix A, Part I and II), and five-item demographic items (see Appendix B).

The inventory items were developed based on components of the literature reviewed in Chapter II that were highlighted as being critical to identifying persistence factors in college students, such as feeling connected or that they belonged in that environment. The construction of the survey items involved identifying overlapping concepts and principles that have been shown to be valid measures of student success and persistence (e.g., connectedness). In addition, specific consideration was given to The Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) Scale (Goodenow, 1993, p. 84). Individual items that were expanded upon included: “I feel like a real part of (name of school)”, “Sometimes I feel as if I don’t belong here”, “There is at least one teacher or other adult in this school I can talk to if I have a problem” (Goodenow, 1993, p. 84). This scale was used as a template to expand upon due to the thoroughness and effectiveness of the connectedness measures it quantified.

Connectedness survey items. The connectedness survey (see Appendix A, Part I) is intended to record responses that fall under the non-cognitive domain of connectedness. “How connected students feel to their university is an important construct to consider when looking at why students may or may not persist at an institution” (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012, p. 484). Measuring factors of connectedness in relation to student experience is relevant to the data collection because it gives insight to how they feel about their educational setting.

The inventory draws upon connectedness factors that have been previously mentioned in this paper that pertain to a student's sense of belonging and gauges the need for possible interventions. This inventory measures three subscales of connectedness: *higher education belonging*, culturally relevant teaching, and cultural role modeling. Higher education belonging is a significant variable to measure because of the necessity to learn where students stand, in reference to current levels of connectedness in their institution. Culturally relevant teaching at the high school level is important due to the importance educators have on the educational trajectory of students. In addition, cultural role modeling is a key component to understand due to the impact mentors have on students' ability to connect to school. These student factors have the potential to give insight to different facets of connectedness that pertain to the first year college experience. As a note, culturally relevant teaching and role modeling were measured as a single domain. The reason these two measures were grouped together is because the literature in Chapter II highlighted the fact that these two approaches have the potential to impact students in a personal manner that pushes them to succeed in K-12 educational settings. The goal was to illustrate how the students connected to their education before attending college and how they connected upon entry to the university. Table 2 represents the content validity as it corresponds to the subscales measured by the inventory questions.

Table 2

Content Validity as Measured by the Inventory

Inventory Item	Connectedness Subscale Domain
Survey Question 1	Culturally Relevant Teaching/ Cultural Role Modeling
Survey Question 2	Higher Education Belonging
Survey Question 3	Culturally Relevant Teaching/ Cultural Role Modeling
Survey Question 4	Higher Education Belonging
Survey Question 5	Culturally Relevant Teaching/ Cultural Role Modeling
Survey Question 6	Higher Education Belonging
Survey Question 7	Culturally Relevant Teaching/ Cultural Role Modeling
Survey Question 8 (Reverse Coded)*	Higher Education Belonging
Survey Question 9	Culturally Relevant Teaching/ Cultural Role Modeling
Survey Question 10	Higher Education Belonging
Open-Response Question 1	Culturally Relevant Teaching/ Cultural Role Modeling
Open-Response Question 2	Higher Education Belonging

*Question formatted in order to reduce acquiescence bias.

Open-response questions. The two open-response questions included: 1) *In your high school education, did you have teachers and/or mentors that took an interest in your achievements? (Yes/No). If so, what did they do to make you feel that way?* And 2) *Upon entry to San José State, did you feel like you were a part of the campus community? (Yes/No). How did your connection or lack of connection affect your college experience?*

The open-response questions are meant to gather more in depth responses from the students as they pertain to the main themes of the inventory. Questions one and two

correspond to the culturally relevant teaching/cultural role modeling and higher education belonging domains measured by the survey.

Demographic questionnaire. The purpose of the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) was to connect and compare student responses to specific identities present in the student populations. The demographic questions pertained to students' class standing, race/ethnicity, parents'/guardians' highest level of education completed, and social class (based on income).

Procedure

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling. Arrangements were made with San José State University's EDCO 004 course coordinator and individual instructors for the principal investigator to administer a paper copy of the survey to select EDCO 004 sections during the Spring 2016 semester. The principal investigator attended the EDCO 004 sections on a scheduled time and date, per the convenience of the instructor, to administer the survey. It was made verbally clear that participation in the study was completely voluntary, had no grade bearing implications, and that there was no compensation. In addition, a brief outline of the study was mentioned along with instructions on how to fill out the inventory. For those students who agreed to participate in the study, they received a paper copy of the inventory, demographic questionnaire, (see Appendices A and B) and an informed consent form (see Appendix C). The students who choose to complete the survey did so at that time and place, since arrangements were made with the instructor to have that allocated class time and space. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The principal investigator then collected the

surveys and the informed consent forms were left with the students who completed the survey. As a closing statement, the informed consent forms were referenced as a procedural and informational resource in the event that those that completed the survey had any questions or concerns about their participation in the study.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Tables and charts were also created using these tools. A descriptive statistic approach was used in order to interpret the information.

The qualitative data were analyzed by coding themes present in the responses. Themes that occurred in higher consistencies were highlighted and were then interpreted in relation to the research literature discussed in Chapter II as a means to give context and validity to the student responses.

Chapter IV: Results

The overarching purpose of this study was to collect data to better understand college students in order to help them stay in college and graduate. Connectedness was highlighted as the means to help students stay and succeed in college. If students felt like they were part of the college community then they were more likely to stay enrolled. The goal of the data collection was to begin the process of learning the conditions in which students are entering college. The themes represented by the data included culturally relevant teaching, cultural role modeling, and higher education belonging. The listed themes give an insight to how students interacted with school before they entered college and soon after they enrolled. The data were collected with the intent to provide recommendations to contribute to the development of approaches to help first year college students acclimate to their new setting in order to succeed and persist to graduation.

Culturally Relevant Teaching & Cultural Role Modeling

Culturally relevant teaching and cultural role modeling were specifically chosen as themes of inquiry because they were highlighted in Chapter II as an approach for students to connect to learning and success.

Quantitative results. The intent of this subscale was to learn about how students connected to their teachers and/or mentor figures in high school. Culturally relevant teaching and cultural role modeling were highlighted as a means for students to connect to their education through the educational support staff. In regards to this subscale, the responses to the survey quantified the extent students positively connected to teachers

and mentors. Table 3 illustrates the mean scores and standard deviations of the culturally relevant teaching and cultural role modeling subscale items collected through the survey. The data are organized on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 represents “Strongly Disagree” and 4 represents “Strongly Agree.”

Table 3
Culturally Relevant Teaching & Cultural Role Modeling Frequencies

	Item 1. In high school, I trusted my teachers to have my best interest in mind.	Item 3. In high school, I felt that my teachers understood me as a person.	Item 5. I have someone with a similar value system that I look up to and/or admire.	Item 7. I have a role model that I can relate to on a personal/professional level.	Item 9. My peers and I were treated with respect in high school.
N	112*	113	112*	113	113
Mean	2.96	2.74	3.22	2.85	3.00
Std. Deviation	.684	.777	.768	.868	.694

*One missing response from data set.

The data show that students responded more positively than negatively to each item, thus skewing the results towards the higher end of the spectrum. This information illustrates that the students surveyed had an overall more positive connection to their educational support staff.

Student/Teacher interaction. Items 1 and 3 targeted students’ perceptions of the trust and understanding they perceived from their high school teachers. Figure 1 and Figure 2 illustrate the students’ responses to items 1 and 3 in the survey.

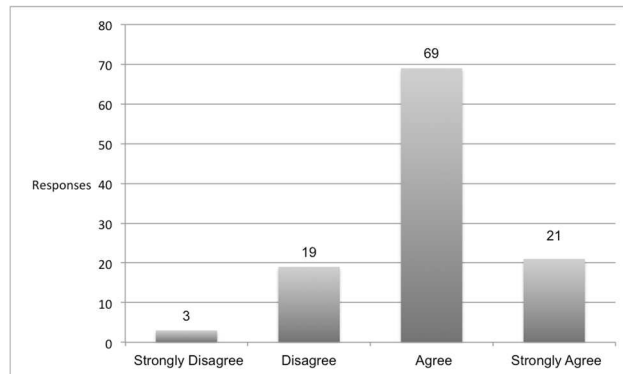


Figure 1. Item 1: In high school, I trusted my teachers to have my best interest in mind.

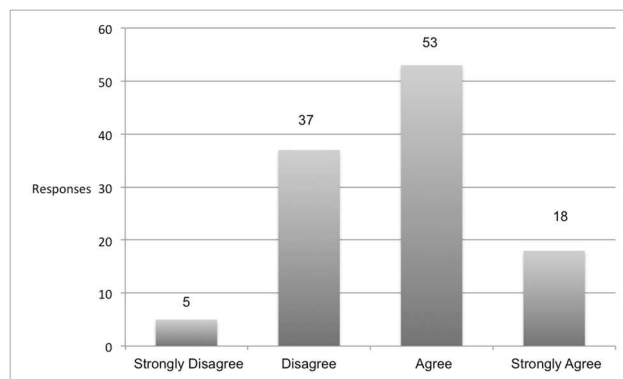


Figure 2. Item 3: In high school, I felt that my teachers understood me as a person.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate that a majority of students surveyed had trust and felt understood by their teachers in high school. This information is significant because it suggests that their teachers were able to relate to them as individuals enough to be able to develop personal connections that transcend the classroom limitations of content. The data correspond to culturally relevant teaching practices because they highlight the fact that students are able to get their perspectives understood by their teachers enough to trust them to have their true best interests in mind. The relationship between teacher and student in high school is important to learner inclination to education due to the high frequency of interaction and the status of authority that teachers possess.

Student/Role model interaction. Items 5 and 7 assessed if students had role models they identified with on more than just a superficial level. It was the intent of these items to identify if students had aligned value systems with someone that commands positive regard. Figure 3 and Figure 4 illustrate the students' responses to items 5 and 7 in the survey.

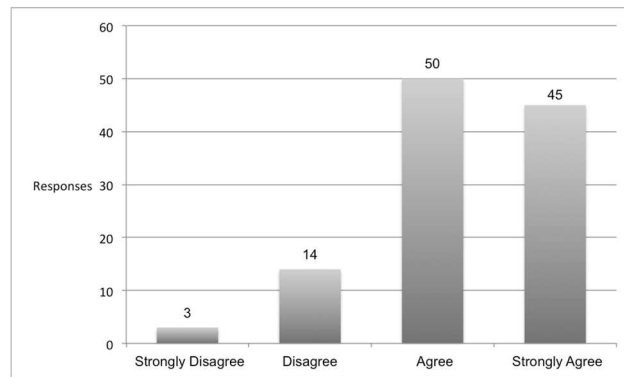


Figure 3. Item 5: I have someone with a similar value system that I look up to and/or admire.

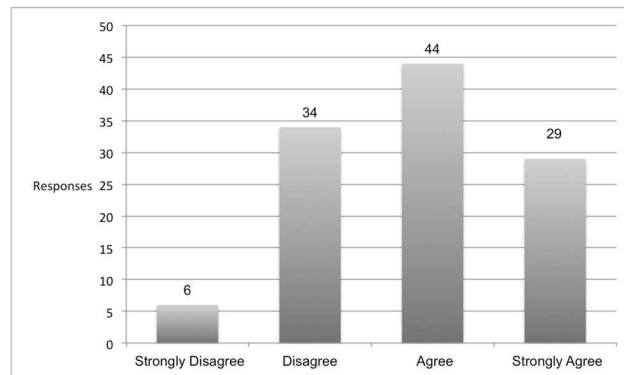


Figure 4. Item 7: I have a role model that I can relate to on a personal/professional level.

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate that a majority of students surveyed positively identified with a role model type figure. Item 5 in particular had the highest mean score of 3.22 out of a possible 4 points in the entire survey (see Table 3). This information is significant because it suggests that students are connecting to role models that are like them. The

data give credence to the concept of cultural role modeling and the benefits associated with students seeing attributes of themselves in individuals they hold with high regard.

Learning environment connection. Item 9 gauged how students felt in regards to respect from others in their high school environment. In addition, item 9 also consisted of students' perception of how their peers were being treated. Figure 5 illustrates the students' responses to item 9 in the survey.

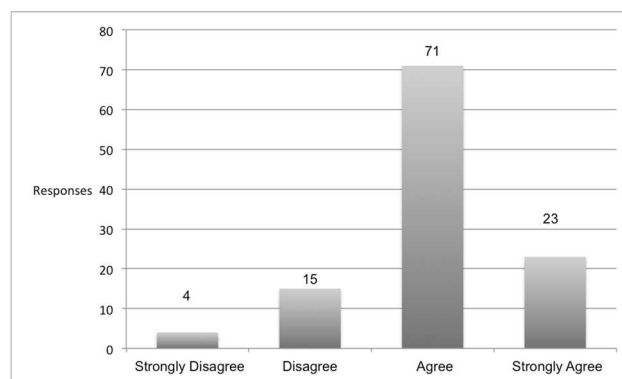


Figure 5. Item 9: My peers and I were treated with respect in high school.

Figure 5 illustrates that a strong majority of students surveyed felt they and their peers were respected in high school. Item 9 had the second highest mean score of 3 out of a possible 4 points (see Table 3) in the culturally relevant teaching and cultural role modeling subscale. This information is significant because that means that, during high school, students were learning in an environment in which they feel respected.

Qualitative results. The open responses to the connectedness subscale of culturally relevant teaching and cultural role modeling gave an insight to the manner in which students were impacted by their teachers and mentors. In the open-response section of the inventory, 76 out of 113 respondents answered “Yes” to the question “*In your high school education, did you have teachers and/or mentors that took an interest in*

your achievements? (Yes/No). If so, what did they do to make you feel that way?" The respondents who answered "Yes" to this question, resoundingly attributed their teachers for taking an interest in their achievements. There was a low occurrence of reference to mentors that were not teachers in the responses that were collected. These data illustrate that teachers were the largest contributor to students feeling like someone in their high school cared about their achievements. The data collected also showed that consideration to future academic success and personal life/development were the two factors that had the largest impact on students feeling like their teachers/mentors took an interest in their achievements.

Interest in relation to future academic success. How did high school teachers make students feel like they cared about their achievements? The highest frequency response to this question is that teachers inquired about students' futures with consideration to furthering education. A couple of student responses are provided below to illustrate this point.

Yes. My AP U.S. history teacher had the best interest in me because [she] constantly asked what I wanted to do with my life. I never thought that about myself, so she helped me think about who I wanted to become. (Respondent 2, Freshman)

Yes. My teachers/counselor asked me first and foremost why I wanted to go to college. They made it more about how I was to get myself there and praised me for every step I took to get into college (SAT, scholarships, etc.). (Respondent 87, Sophomore)

Roughly a third of the responses fell under this category, where students responded they were made to feel that someone was invested in their achievements because their teachers cared about their future. This type of support is beneficial to the

K-12 student population because it helps them get to college. Having someone believe in their abilities can tangibly positively impact students' academic trajectory.

Interest in relation to personal life/development. The second highest response to this question highlighted the impact of teachers giving personalized attention to matters outside of the realm of academics. There was a consistent theme of teachers helping with students' personal lives and personal development.

Yes, they would often ask how everything was going and would dive deep into my personal life. They heard and gave me insight along with understanding. (Respondent 11, Sophomore)

Yes. I had a few mentors that wanted to see me as well as many of my other peers to be successful through school programs that encouraged us to do well. They listened to my problems and gave me as much advice as possible in order to make it seem like there are always options. (Respondent 19, Sophomore)

Yes. I went to a very small high school and had great relationships with my teachers. I recall having conversations and receiving helpful life advice from them in addition to my education. (Respondent 41, Freshman)

The students that highlighted the attention to their personal development outside of academics appeared to have a strong sense of value connected to this type of support. In addition to academics, the student experience is made up of corresponding factors that do affect academic success. Chapter II illustrated that the student experience is a multivariate continuum and support differs by student need. For these students, they were fortunate enough to have non-academic encouragement from caring support figures.

Higher Education Belonging

Higher education belonging was specifically chosen as a theme of inquiry because it illustrates through the responses how students connected upon college entry. This

information is significant because it shows the manner in which students interact with the university and whether or not they feel a part of their school.

Quantitative results. The intent of this subscale was to learn about the degree to which students felt connected to San José State University (SJSU) and to their SJSU peers. The running theme of this paper highlights that having a sense of connectedness and/or belonging in higher education is the key to students persisting past the first year of attendance. This subscale measures how students connect to their peers and the institution as a whole. The survey included items 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10, and students were asked to respond to them using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” However, item 8 was reverse coded in order to reduce acquiescence bias. Therefore, the results for item 8 are interpreted inversely. Table 4 illustrates the mean scores and standard deviations of the higher education belonging subscale items collected through the survey.

Table 4
Higher Education Belonging Frequencies

	Item 2. I can easily relate with other students in my classes.	Item 4. I feel like I belong at <i>San José State</i> .	Item 6. I can talk to my peers about problems I am having.	Item 8. It is hard for me to get along with other students at <i>San José State</i> .	Item 10. I can be myself at <i>San José State</i> .
N	113	112*	113	113	113
Mean	2.94	2.99	2.99	1.93	3.11
Std. Deviation	.645	.704	.726	.691	.588

*One missing response from data set.

The data show that students overall responded positively to each item. This information suggests that the students surveyed reported a positive sense of belonging to San José State University and a connection with their peers at SJSU.

Peer interaction. Items 2, 6, and 8 specifically targeted how students felt they related, communicated, and got along to their peers. It was the intent of these items to identify the level of connection students felt towards other students. Figures 6, 7, and 8 illustrate the students' responses to items 2, 6, and 8 in the survey.

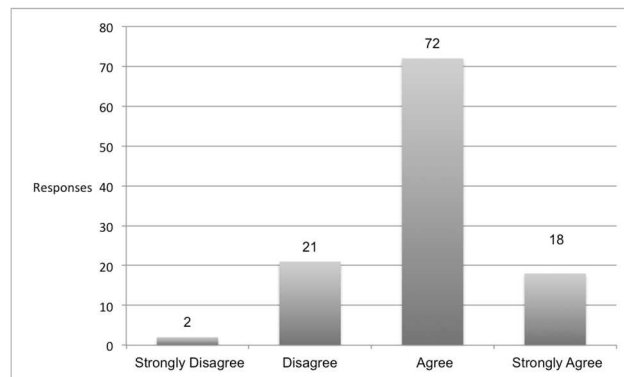


Figure 6. Item 2: I can easily relate with other students in my classes.

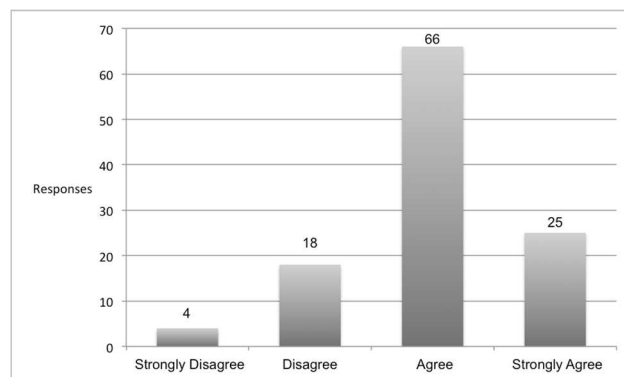


Figure 7. Item 6: I can talk to my peers about problems I am having.

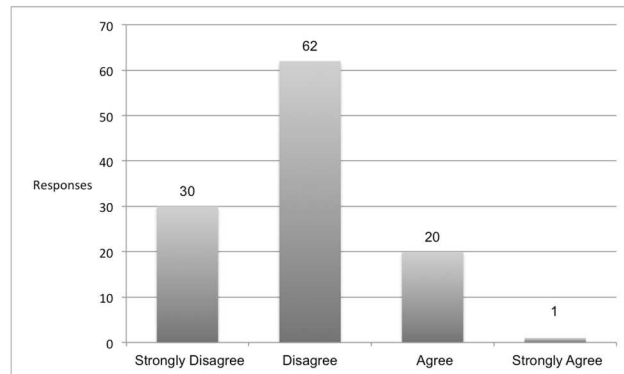


Figure 8. Item 8: It is hard for me to get along with other students at *San José State*.

Figures 6, 7, and 8 illustrate that a majority of students surveyed had a positive relationship to other students. These items scored in relation to each other in individual responses and averages. This information is significant because it suggests that, overall, students are connecting with each other. The data show that students are relating, supporting, and getting along with each other. As mentioned in Chapter II, developing social networks increases social capital that is beneficial in helping students acclimate to their college setting.

Institutional connection. Items 4 and 10 gauged how students felt in regards to San José State University as an institution. These items indicated whether or not students identified as a members of their college community. Figure 9 and Figure 10 illustrate the students' responses to items 4 and 10 in the survey.

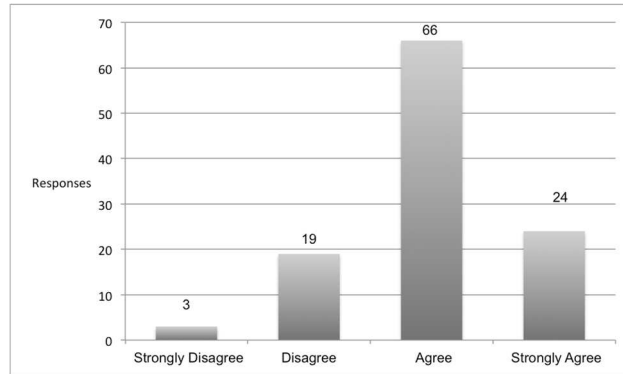


Figure 9. Item 4: I feel like I belong at *San José State*.

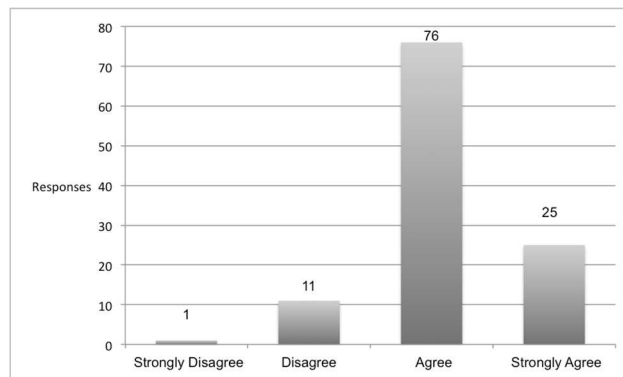


Figure 10. Item 10: I can be myself at *San José State*.

Figures 9 and 10 illustrate that a majority of the students who responded personally identified with their university as a member of the campus community. Item 4 directly tackled the concept of higher education belonging by asking the students if they felt like they belonged to their university. The high levels of positive responses show that, a strong majority of the students surveyed felt like they belonged at the university they currently attended. In addition, item 10 supplemented the higher education belonging subscale by highlighting the fact that a strong majority of students surveyed feel comfortable enough at school to be genuine and themselves. This information is significant because it suggest these students have a connection to their campus and that bond is beneficial to student persistence.

Qualitative results. The open responses to the connectedness subscale of higher education belonging gave an insight to the manner in which students connected to the campus community upon entry to San José State University and the effect it had on their college experience. In this open-response question, only 51 out of the 113 participants answered “Yes” and 48 answered “No” to the question, “*Upon entry to San José State, did you feel like you were a part of the campus community? (Yes/No). How did your connection or lack of connection affect your college experience?*” In addition, a supplemental eight respondents gave no specific “Yes/No” response, but the content of their replies highlighted difficulty in connecting to the campus upon entry. The respondents who answered “Yes” to this question resoundingly attributed their connection to San José State University to membership in clubs, sports, and peer connections. Inversely, the respondents who answered “No” to this question attributed their absence of connection to a lack of academic success, transfer status difficulties, and commuter culture. The information collected highlights a representation of incoming students’ positive and negative adaptations.

Belonging to the campus community. Just over 45% of the students reported that they did feel connected upon entry to the university. As stated before, this sense of belonging to the campus community was highly attributed to involvement in clubs, sports, and peer connections. These respondents highlighted that by belonging to a community on campus, they were able to feel a sense of belonging to the university.

Yes. I was fortunate to make friends easily and join a sorority. If I did not make the friends that I have right now I would probably drop out and go back home.
(Respondent 12, Freshman)

Yes. I am a student athlete here in San Jose so I had connections with all the athletes. We compete together and work together so it was really fun. (Respondent 39, Freshman)

Yes. I made a lot of new friends in college, so having friends on campus made me really happy. I had friends to go to class with and events to. My college experience is going extremely well. (Respondent 10, Freshman)

The students who felt a sense of belonging to the campus highlighted a sense of involvement to their feelings of connection to the campus. In addition, a theme that was consistent in almost all the “Yes” responses was the presence of peer connections. Making and having friends on campus upon entry had an impact in the “Yes” responses. As mentioned in Chapter II in the social capital section, the development of positive relationships in the college setting helps students acclimate to their new setting.

Disconnect to the campus community. Just over 42% of the students surveyed felt a tangible sense of disconnect and even loneliness from the university. Based on the literature review, these are the students most likely to dropout of the university. As stated previously, the students surveyed highlighted a lack of academic success, transfer status difficulties, and commuter culture as reasons for not feeling connected to the university.

No. My first semester was difficult both academically & socially. I think the effects from my academic standing contributed to me not trying to be involved in the SJSU. (Respondent 44, Freshman)

No. It was difficult making friends as a transfer student. That seems to be the general consensus among transfers unless you join a fraternity/sorority. It is because of this lack of community that causes me to not spend as much time on campus. (Respondent 5, Senior)

No. I am a commuter student, and therefore am only here for a short amount of time each day. The relationships I tried to make fell apart because of this. I feel as though I could be getting a lot more out of college if I were integrated in the community more. (Respondent 41, Freshman)

The students who did not feel connected to the campus appeared to have barriers that prevented them from belonging to the university. Their responses also strongly connected to an absence of peer group support and membership. The responses illustrate that belonging to the campus community is synonymous with having friends on campus. In fact, there were direct instances of a lack of social networks contributing to negative college experiences and campus disconnect.

No, upon entry at San Jose, I felt lost and very alone. My lack of connection made my first semester more difficult than it needed to be. (Respondent 54, Freshman)

I came in as an upper division transfer student. In many of my classes people arrived as class started and left as class ended not talking much to each other. This made it hard to meet people and make friends. I wished I had the time to join a club to meet more people. (Respondent 56, Senior)

The responses illustrate that in order to be a member of the school community, there needs to be a human connection component. These students do not equate higher education belonging to having school pride or connecting to the physical institution itself. Instead, they equate higher education belonging to connections they make with people in the university, particularly college peers.

Chapter V: Discussion & Conclusion

Attending a higher education institution for the first time comes with challenges that not only pertain to academics. The slew of obstacles incoming students face upon college entry requires specialized attention in order to support this student population.

Many first-time freshman need support with the every day facets of college culture and often do not understand the multiple intricate layers that contribute to the daily functioning of a university. (Oliver, Pizarro, Cheers, & Halualani, 2015, p. 56)

The intent of this study was to understand how students connect to school in their K-12 education and how they connect upon college entry. These students do not come into higher education institutions as blank slates. They enter college with a set of backgrounds, experiences, and skills that both help and hinder academic success. Learning how incoming students interact with their educational institutions can help those in academic support capacities to tailor assistance approaches and interventions made to retain students and guide them towards graduation.

Chapter II highlighted the conditions in which students mediate through K-12 education and the conditions that can lead to difficulty in their first year of college. This information is supplemented with interventions and approaches that have the potential to help students along their educational journey. The intent of this information is to give insight to the student experience as they transition from high school to college. Chapter III illustrated the attempt to develop an instrument that would measure the level of connectedness the incoming student population had in relation to their high school and new university. The intent of this approach was to gather information to help develop

student profiles that take into consideration the eclectic experiences of this student population in order to tailor approaches that match their necessity.

Discussion

The combination of qualitative and quantitative information collected was intended to provide an introductory holistic look at students' experiences in high school and the first year of college. The quantitative data provided an overall positive representation of students in reference to belonging in both high school and higher education. The qualitative data are congruent with the high school quantitative data. This is significant because it suggests that similar conclusions can be drawn from the two types of data. For example, students' positive replies to the survey items and the open-response question illustrated that there was a positive impact made pre-college entry. More specifically, a significant number of the respondents mentioned that teachers had a constructive impact on their high school experience. Combining quantitative and qualitative data enabled a clearer picture of students' positive sense of belonging and connectedness in high school.

However, upon analyzing the subscale of higher education belonging, there was an immediate incongruence between the quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data illustrated that students connected quite well to the university and their peers, but the qualitative data suggested there were strong representations of disconnect with the campus and peers. The qualitative data indicated that about half of the respondents did not feel connected to SJSU and to their SJSU peers.

Limitations

A highlighted limitation to this study is the fact that data were collected in the second semester of the school year. The time at which the data were collected has the potential to omit representations of students that have already been lost to attrition. The opportune time to collect this data would have been in the first semester of college attendance.

A secondary limitation of the study consisted of not reporting the differences in responses between first year students and non-first year students. Due to the sample size, there were not enough responses in each class standing to attribute differences in responses to class standing. The same limitation holds true for low-income and first-generation respondents. Only 21 respondents out of the 113 surveyed identified as coming from a low-income background and 24 respondents out of the 113 surveyed identified as being a first-generation college students. There is not a large enough representation for these specific groups to infer results. It was the intent of the study to have a more thorough analysis for low-income and first-generation students.

Research Implications & Recommendations

The results of this study suggest that teachers can and are seen in a positive light when students feel trust and understanding with them. These findings highlight the need to incorporate a model of culturally relevant teaching in college instruction. The higher education belonging qualitative data was absent of faculty interaction. These same students who resoundingly highlighted the impact of educators as supporting figures during their high school education were not mentioned in relation to connecting to

college. Strong faculty involvement in the lives of incoming students would provide support in a capacity that students are already familiar with, within a student-teacher relationship. This can be seen as a humanistic counseling approach. As a tool for support, this approach also has the potential to address individual needs students possess because educators can give their trust, understanding, knowledge, and support in a one-on-one capacity.

In addition, the absence of peer connections for those students who did not feel a connection to the university campus was a cause for concern. While the number of university clubs and organizations are often quite extensive, for example San José State University, Student Involvement (2016) lists 435 active organizations. Campus groups have been referenced as a space for students to voluntarily connect to the university, but the classroom is a space that is allocated by all students. As an intervention approach, the need to develop deeper relationships in the classrooms is critical to help students connect to one another. Assignments that enable students to get to know one another and highlight similarities in each other are a step in the right direction for addressing this concern.

The highlight of this study was the open-response data collected. This component gave depth to the student responses. The study illustrated that students respond well to support from teachers in K-12 education. To build on the results of this study, supplementary information about how students interact with faculty upon entry would help higher education institutions understand how the faculty is perceived. In addition, it would be beneficial to know how faculty should best approach the development of

student/faculty relationship development. Having students connect with faculty members affords the potential for a person-to-person relationship that builds connection to the campus. In addition, it allows students to connect with members of the campus community that know the university and can give program specific, career specific, and/or college specific support.

Conclusion

The original intent of this study was to learn why students dropout of college more heavily within their first year and to highlight connectedness as a measure that has the potential to positively impact student persistence. The premise of this paper is that if students feel more connected to their campus, they are less likely to dropout. With this theme in mind, it is then up to researchers and educators to identify what makes students feel like they belong to their campus. The study illustrated that developing relationships with other people (e.g., college peers) is what leads to students feeling connected to their campus. It is by connecting people to each other in a university that attrition shall be one step closer to being remedied.

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Appendix A. Inventory

Part I: Survey

<i>Please answer the following questions by circling <u>one</u> response.</i>		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	In high school, I trusted my teachers to have my best interest in mind.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2.	I can easily relate with other students in my classes.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
3.	In high school, I felt that my teachers understood me as a person.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
4.	I feel like I belong at <i>San Jose State</i> .	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
5.	I have someone with a similar value system that I look up to and/or admire.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6.	I can talk to my peers about problems I am having.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
7.	I have a role model that I can relate to on a personal/professional level.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
8.	It is hard for me to get along with other students at <i>San Jose State</i> .	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
9.	My peers and I were treated with respect in high school.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
10.	I can be myself at <i>San Jose State</i> .	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Part II: *Open-Response*

1. In your high school education, did you have teachers and/or mentors that took an interest in your achievements? (Yes/No). If so, what did they do to make you feel that way?

2. Upon entry to *San José State*, did you feel like you were a part of the campus community? (Yes/No). How did your connection or lack of connection affect your college experience?

Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire

Part III: *Demographic Information*

1. What is your class standing?
 - Freshmen (1st Year Student)
 - Sophomore (2nd Year Student)
 - Junior (3rd Year Student)
 - Senior (4th; 5th; & Higher Year Student)

2. What is your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)
 - American Indian, Native Alaskan, Indigenous Mesoamerican
 - South East Asian, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, Vietnamese, Filipino
 - Asian, Asian American, Chinese, Japanese, Korean
 - Black, African, or African American
 - Mexican, Mexican American, Latino
 - White, Caucasian, European Dissent
 - Decline to State
 - Other (please specify) _____

3. What is the highest level of education your Mother/Guardian completed?
 - None
 - Elementary School
 - Middle School
 - High School
 - Community College (2 Year Degree, AA, AS, AE)
 - College/University (4 Year Degree, BA, BS, BFA)
 - Postgraduate/Professional [Master's (MA, MS, MBA, MFA), Doctorate (PhD, EdD), Doctor of Medicine (MD), Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS), Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), Juris Doctor (JD)]
 - Do Not Know

4. What is the highest level of education your Father/Guardian completed?
 - None
 - Elementary School
 - Middle School
 - High School
 - Community College (2 Year Degree, AA, AS, AE)
 - College/University (4 Year Degree, BA, BS, BFA)
 - Postgraduate/Professional [Master's (MA, MS, MBA, MFA), Doctorate (PhD, EdD), Doctor of Medicine (MD), Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS), Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), Juris Doctor (JD)]
 - Do Not Know

5. If society were divided into three social classes (based on income), which class would you fall under?
 - Low
 - Middle
 - High

Appendix C. Informed Consent Form



Counselor Education

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Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego,
San Francisco, San José, San Luis Obispo,
San Marcos, Sonoma, Stanislaus

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH INFORMED CONSENT FORM

FACULTY SUPERVISOR: Dr. Dolores D. Mena

TITLE OF STUDY: Aligning K – 12 and Higher Education

RESEARCHER: Edgar Martinez, San José State University, Counselor Education (EDCO) Graduate Student

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to join the collective strengths of K – 12 and higher education research in order to develop an academic profile of students entering college for the first time. This survey will draw from student factors that have been solidified in K – 12 education that pertain to academic, social, and personal success. The data collected will be used in order to shed light on student characteristics that have the potential to inhibit student success. By learning this information, higher education institutions can knowledgeably support student persistence in a personalized approach that takes into consideration their experiences.

PROCEDURES: Completion of this survey is not part of the EDCO 004 class assignments and will not have any grade bearing implications. You will be asked to complete a short survey about how you connect and have connected to your school surroundings. The expected length of completion is approximately 10 minutes.

POTENTIAL RISKS: Completing the survey involves no risk to you.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: Direct benefits for the academic community include the acquisition of a generalized knowledge that has the potential to assist those in educational support capacities in the practice of transitioning students to college and university settings.

COMPENSATION: There is no compensation for participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Although the results of this survey may be published, no identifying information will not be collected nor reported that could specifically identify you.

RESTRICTIONS: You must be at least 18 years or older to participate in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study without any negative effect on your relations with San José State University or Edgar Martinez. This consent form is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You will not waive any rights if you choose not to participate. There is no penalty for stopping your participation in the survey.

QUESTIONS & CONCERNS:

- For further information about the study, please contact Edgar Martinez at edgar.martinez01@sjsu.edu.
- Complaints about the study may be presented to Dr. Lewis Aptekar (San José State University, Counselor Education Department Chair) over the phone at 408.924.3662 or by e-mail lewis.aptekar@sjsu.edu.
- For questions about participants' rights or if you feel you have been harmed in any way by your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Pamela Stacks (San José State University, Associate Vice President of Research) by phone at 408.924.2479.

RESEARCHER STATEMENT: I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to learn about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and the purpose, risks, benefits, and procedures of this research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

Researcher's Name (printed)

Researcher's Signature

Date