

Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF COUNSELORS
HELPING UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS FROM LOS ANGELES CHARTER HIGH
SCHOOLS ACCESS AND PERSIST IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership Administration and Policy

by

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

There were dual purposes of this qualitative phenomenological study. The first purpose was to describe and compare the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of college counseling programs in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles as experienced and shared by high school college counselors. The second purpose was to explore what college preparatory charter high school college counselors perceive to be the most important components in a charter high school college-going culture to assist underrepresented students with access to college and preparation to persist in higher education.

This phenomenological study utilized interviews to collect data. The one-on-one interviews were with college counselors at Los Angeles college-preparatory charter high schools where at least 60% of students are from underrepresented backgrounds. The 9 interview questions were developed to learn about the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of college counseling programs at the participants' high schools. The questions were also designed to learn about what counselors perceive as important components in a college-going culture to help underrepresented students access and persist in higher education.

The study yielded 5 conclusions. First, students and families from underrepresented backgrounds rely on their schools to inform them about the college preparation process. Second, parental involvement helps hold students academically accountable and helps them pursue higher education. Third, individualized academic advising is critical for student success. Fourth, charter high schools provide insight to address student-to-counselor ratios, which influence the quality of high school college counseling programs. Lastly, students' ability to adapt and navigate changes in academic rigor, social environment, and academic community impacts their college access and persistence.

The study yielded 4 recommendations. First, states, districts, and schools are encouraged to continue to address student-to-counselor ratios to enable personalized college counseling that students need. Second, it is advised that counselors have conversations about college in collaboration with parents. Third, it is recommended that schools provide opportunities via their college counseling programs to expose students to individuals from different backgrounds and to different environments. Finally, it is suggested that high schools challenge students academically to help them prepare for the academic rigor of higher education.

Chapter One: The Problem

This chapter presents an overview of this dissertation study. The chapter begins with the background of the study, which is followed by the problem statement, purpose of the study, importance of the study, operational definitions, key terms, theoretical framework summary, conceptual framework summary, research questions, limitations, delimitations, and assumptions. The chapter concludes with an overview of the organization of the dissertation study.

Background of the Study

A college degree has become one of the most important indicators of economic stability and professional success for individuals in the United States (Angeli & Fuller, 2009; Inamdar, 2009; Jones, Bensimon, McNair & Dowd, 2011). According to The Campaign for College Opportunity (2012), individuals with a four-year college degree earn more than \$1,340,000 in their lifetimes than their counterparts with only a high school diploma. Hill (2008) shared that the economic benefits of a college education have led to the demand for baccalaureate degrees. Additionally, individuals who complete some college spend less of their lifetime in poverty (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2013). Thus, a college education is pivotal to student success (Campaign, 2013).

With the increased importance of a college degree, it is critical to consider the factors that may impact current educational statistics (Campaign, 2013; College Board, 2009; Hill, 2008;). According to the College Board (2009), the number of students attending college continues to rise; however the retention rates for students in higher education do not mirror the enrollment rates. Farmer-Hinton (2010) and Roderick, Coca, and Nagaoka (2011) explain that two components of college access—summer transitions and matching students to colleges that will be good fits—impact student retention. Clinedinst, Hurley, and Hawkins (2013) further share that

college attrition rates are higher for students from underrepresented backgrounds. Meanwhile, Engle, Yeado, Brusi, and Cruz (2012) share that attrition rates for underrepresented students have decreased at four-year universities, yet increased at two-year colleges. Engle and Lynch (2009) share that college graduation rates for low-income students were at 10%, compared to 76% for high-income students. The discussion of helping students find an adequate college match also shifts the focus to the way in which students are learning and preparing to persist in college as they access higher education (Ensor, 2005; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; Roderick et al., 2011). Thus, this study highlights the access and preparation that underrepresented students need to persist in higher education.

McDonough (2004) explains that students who come from lower socioeconomic status (SES) apply and attend college at lower rates than their counterparts who come from higher SES backgrounds. While more students are matriculating in higher education, the number of students from underrepresented backgrounds who access four-year educational institutions remains lower than it is for students from higher SES groups (Moore, Tan, & Shulock, 2014; Executive Office, 2014). Students from underrepresented backgrounds are those who come from low socioeconomic status, enter higher education at lower rates, come from households in which they are the first generation to go to college, and are often from a racial/ethnic minority group (California Charter Schools, 2014; Farmer-Hinton, & McCullough, 2008). Recognizing the importance of a college degree for succeeding in the current economy, U.S. President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama continue to support initiatives that aim to close the gap that exists in higher education (Executive Office, 2014). President Obama and his wife spearhead the current campaign to send more students into higher education by 2020 and continue making college access a priority for politicians, educators, families, and citizens across the nation

(Executive Office, 2014). The goal is to increase the percentage of individuals obtaining a college degree from 41.2% to approximately 60% by 2020 (Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, 2011). Nationwide, individuals in the top half of the income distribution have contributed to the increase of degrees attained, while the numbers have fallen for those in the bottom quartile of the income distribution (Pell, 2011).

Because students from lower SES are less likely to pursue higher education when compared to their higher SES counterparts, college access has become a popular topic across K-16 educators and policymakers (California Charter Schools, 2014; Koven, 2009; Lumina Foundation, 2014; McDonough, 2004; Reid & Moore, 2008). Moreover, college counseling efforts to increase access and enrollment in postsecondary education has become more prevalent in recent years due to the demand of an educated work force (Koven, 2009). However, college access continues to be a struggle for students who come from urban schools and/or low-income communities, have parents who did not attend college, or are Black or Latino (Bell, Rowan-Kenyon, & Perna, 2009; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen, 2009; McDonough, 2004; Perna et al., 2008; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2012). Students from underrepresented backgrounds still enroll in higher education; however their focus is generally on two-year colleges or less selective colleges (Perna et al., 2008). Oftentimes, students from these backgrounds face financial challenges, receive insufficient support, or lack enough college knowledge, all of which prevent them from enrolling in higher education (Hill, 2008; Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2012).

California has the most low-income families residing in the U.S., and only about 40% of these families pursue postsecondary education (Campaign, 2013). With California having the largest population of low-income families, it also has the largest number of individuals without a

high school diploma, and thus fewer students pursuing higher education (Campaign, 2013). Current statistics on the number of students pursuing and completing higher education predict that California will fall 2.3 million college graduates short from meeting the demands of the workforce in 2025 (Angeli & Fuller, 2009; Campaign, 2012, 2013). Still, only 40.6% of graduating high school students from California enrolled in a California public college or university in 2009 (Angeli & Fuller, 2009; California County Comparison, 2009; Reid & Moore, 2008). In fact, the number of California students enrolling in postsecondary education has increased at a slower pace when compared to other states (California County, 2009; Campaign, 2013; Koven, 2009; Reid & Moore, 2008). California also has the most adults without a high school diploma or its equivalent in the U.S. (California County, 2009; Campaign, 2013; Koven, 2009; Reid & Moore, 2008).

Given California's ethnic and socioeconomic diversity, college access for all Californians remains at the forefront of higher education discussions (Joint Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education, 2010). The California Master Plan for Higher Education brought together the three public higher education systems, California Community College, California State University, and the University of California, to create a pipeline for college access for all Californians with the goal of providing access and equity for all (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2005; University of California Office of the President, 2009). Still, 54 years after the enactment of the California Master Plan for Higher Education, California continues to face challenges to granting college access to all students (Campaign, 2005; Perna et al., 2008). Some of the challenges to college access can be traced back to whether students receive support while in high school to help them apply to college or identify colleges that would be a good fit for them (Ensor, 2005; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; MacDonald & Dorr, 2006). Tuition increases and limited

financial resources also pose a challenge to access to and persistence in higher education (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2011; McDonough, 2004; Radwin, Wine, Siegel, & Bryan, 2013; Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Vargas, 2004).

In the discourse concerning the deficits in higher education attainment among certain minorities and SES brackets, two primary solutions have emerged. These include the bolstering of college counseling programs in public schools and the utilization of charter schools designed to address the needs of underrepresented students (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Ensor, 2005; Koven, 2009; McDonough, 2004; Perna et al., 2008). The importance of an educated workforce for the future of the state makes urgent the need for comprehensive and effective college counseling in the schools (McDonough, 2004; Perna et al., 2008). According to Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008), the quality of college counseling provided by the school and specifically the counselor, impacts a student's ability to pursue and persist in higher education. McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez (2002) further added that a successful college counseling program involves everyone at the school to prepare students for college. College preparation ideally includes smaller counselor-to-student ratios, college counseling for all students, and counselors prioritizing college preparation in their responsibilities (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; McClafferty et al., 2002). However, in traditional public schools, the counselors' responsibilities and large student-to-counselor ratios hinder the depth of college counseling that they are able to provide (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Tierney, Venegas, Coylar, Corwin, & Olivérez, n.d.). Charter schools have smaller student populations and more autonomy, enabling them to provide different and sometimes more in-depth college counseling services that may not be possible for traditional public schools, especially for students from underrepresented backgrounds (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough

2008; Tierney et al., n.d.).

College counseling in public high schools continue to be hindered by the large counselor-to-student ratios and competing priorities of counselors that do not include college counseling (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyan, 2004; Tierney et al., n.d.; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Engberg and Gilbert (2012) note that students need multiple hours of counseling to be able to pursue their college goals. Similarly, Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008) indicate the need for personalized college counseling, which reaffirms the findings that Engberg and Gilbert (2012) describe. However, the large counselor-to-student ratios and counselors' competing priorities in traditional large public high schools impede students from having personalized college counseling (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). Students from underrepresented communities are among the students in these large public schools who receive little to no college counseling (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Still, students from underrepresented backgrounds more commonly rely on the professionals at their schools to help them pursue higher education (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009).

While charter schools also face challenges with their college counseling programs, they have smaller student-to-counselor ratios that allow counselors to provide more in-depth and personalized college counseling (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Many charter schools thus have a *college for all* model and expectation that leads to more active efforts to prepare students for higher education (Farmer-Hinton, 2010). The counselor-to-student ratio in high schools, especially in urban high schools, poses a barrier for students from underrepresented communities (Koven, 2009; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2012). In California, counselors in public high schools have caseloads that do not allow them to offer personalized college counseling

plans for each student (McDonough, 2004; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2012). The smaller enrollment of students in charter schools also helps address the counselor access for students as they prepare for college (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008).

Additionally, charter schools are able to be creative in their programming, which creates more flexibility in their approach to address college access for students, especially students from underrepresented communities (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008).

Charter schools emerged in 1991 as a way to provide school choice in public schooling across the United States and to address the overall achievement and college access gap (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Koven, 2009). During this time period, families wanted to have a choice in the schools that their children attended and thus coined the term *school choice* to refer to this phenomenon (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Koven, 2009). Charter schools are public schools that operate independently from a school district, and each functions autonomously of one another (California Charter Schools, 2013b; Knaak & Knaak, 2013). Soon after their establishment, they were also charged to close the achievement gap per the demands of No Child Left Behind (NCLB; Koven, 2009; Stillings, 2006). Charter schools continue to grow, and currently about 300 additional charter schools open nationwide each year (Koven, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Each state has the ability to set policies for its respective charter high schools and thus decide on their expansion (Toma & Zimmer, 2011). As a state, California has the largest number of charter high schools, totaling 1,063 (California Charter Schools, 2013c). In Los Angeles County, 329 charter schools currently exist, with 262 operating under the Los Angeles Unified School District jurisdiction (California Charter Schools, 2013c). Table 1 displays the number of charter schools in each respective school district within Los Angeles County (C. Obringer, personal communication, June 3, 2014).

Charter schools in California offer an alternative to public education that promotes higher high school graduation rates, and higher completion of A-G course requirements (California Charter Schools, 2014; Koven, 2009). Having students meet A-G course requirements as required for California State University and University of California admission produces higher numbers of students enrolling in four-year universities immediately after high school (Koven, 2009). In 2013, only 39.4% of the 422,177 California high school graduates completed the A-G requirements mandated to apply to the University of California and the California State University systems (California Department of Education, 2014a). Moreover, out of the 382,910 students who graduated high school in 2009, only an estimated 74.4% enrolled in postsecondary educational institutions nationally (California Department of Education, 2014b). From these, 30% of California high school graduates completed A-G requirements, and 68.5% of these graduates were underrepresented students (California Department of Education, 2014a; California Department of Education, 2014b).

Meanwhile, students in Los Angeles charter schools are four times more likely to complete A-G requirements than their counterparts in traditional public high schools (California Charter Schools, 2014). In California, this translates to an average of 76% of high school graduates from California charter schools meeting their A-G requirements (California Charter Schools, 2014).

Through piloting, failures, and successes, charter high schools themselves are trying to strengthen college access to have more students enrolling in four-year universities (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Koven, 2009; California Charter Schools, 2013c). The focus on charter high schools has increased because of the unique flexibility that comes with a smaller campus, a charge for being innovative, and a high level of investment from all administrators to

Table 1

Charter Schools Located within Los Angeles County School Districts as of 2013–2014

School district	Number of charter schools
Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)	262
Inglewood Unified School District	11
Pasadena Unified School District	7
William S. Hart Union High School District	6
Compton Unified School District	4
Lennox Elementary	4
Antelope Valley Union High School District	3
Palmdale Elementary School District	3
Pomona Unified School District	3
West Covina Unified School District	3
Wiseburn Elementary School District	3
Acton-Agua Dulce Unified School District	2
Baldwin Park Unified School District	2
Hawthorne Elementary	2
Hermosa Beach City Elementary School District	2
Lancaster Elementary School District	2
Long Beach Unified School District	2
Rowland Unified School District	2
Burbank Unified School District	1
Centinela Valley Union High School District	1
Duarte Unified School District	1
Gorman Elementary School District	1
Lawndale Elementary School District	1
San Gabriel Unified School District	1

Note. Data received in spreadsheet from the California Charter Schools Association on June 3, 2014.

increase college access and persistence for students in the communities that they serve (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Koven, 2009). However, the hopes remain of finding a model for a college counseling and access program that prepares students for four-year universities and increases acceptance, enrollment, and persistence rates (Koven, 2009).

Problem Statement

Southern California, specifically Los Angeles, has the fastest growing number of charter high schools aiming to provide access to higher education for students who come from underrepresented backgrounds (California Charter Schools, 2014; Koven, 2009). Still, solidified factors, programs, and actions have not been established to cultivate stronger college-going cultures that account for the uniqueness and autonomy of charter high schools, and the 95% of students in charter schools are from underrepresented backgrounds (California Charter Schools, 2014; Koven, 2009; Reid & Moore, 2008). Therefore, there is a need to further study and compare program goals, program designs, and program implementation of college preparatory high school counseling programs in the Los Angeles area that have been successful in providing higher education access to underrepresented students. An additional and related need exists to learn more about what the professional counselors in these charter schools perceive to be the most important components of college-going cultures that support underrepresented students. Charter schools present a unique opportunity to address college access and persistence preparation for underrepresented students because of their autonomy, current success with student A-G course completion, and smaller student-to-counselor ratios that create an opportunity for more personalized college counseling.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is twofold: (a) to describe and

compare the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of college counseling programs in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles as experienced and shared by high school college counselors, and (b) to explore what those counselors perceive to be the most important components in fostering a college-going culture that will help underrepresented students gain access to college and prepare them to persist in higher education.

The Importance of the Study

College access is a topic of primary concern among K-16 educators and policymakers because of the demands of the workforce for educated professionals and the 2020 vision to increase the number of individuals with a college degree in the United States (Lumina Foundation, 2014; Moore, Tan, & Shulock, 2014; Executive Office, 2014). Underrepresented students access and persist in college at lower rates than their counterparts and are less likely to have quality college counseling (Angeli & Fuller, 2009; Campaign, 2013; Engle & Lynch, 2009; Koven, 2009). There is a need to establish an effective and sustainable college counseling program at charter high schools (Koven, 2009; McClafferty et al., 2002). Currently, the literature proposes aspects that should be considered when implementing a college counseling program in all schools (Koven, 2009; McClafferty et al., 2002). However, with the increase of college preparatory charter high schools in California, specifically in Los Angeles, an effective college counseling program is needed to help increase higher education access and persistence for charter high school students (Koven, 2009). Thus, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the literature on college counseling programs in college-preparatory charter high schools that work with underrepresented students to increase college access and retention. Moreover, it is hoped that this study will also address how high school counselors can cater to the needs and challenges faced by underrepresented students in Los Angeles college preparatory charter high schools.

Literature on charter schools remains limited, and thus this study will contribute to the increase of charter school literature (Knaak & Knaak, 2013; Koven, 2009). This study in its nature is qualitative to allow the researcher to explore the experiences of those individuals who provide college counseling services to students. The outcomes from this study might provide further insight to policymakers, charter and non-charter school administrators and counselors, and other college access professionals about the factors, actions, and programs that are most important to accessing higher education for underrepresented students. Lastly, it is hoped that the outcomes from this study will further support educators as they continue to work toward the 2025 vision for higher education.

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following terms with their respective definitions were used to illustrate the variables explored in this study.

Charter high schools. Charter high schools refer to public schools funded through a combination of sources, including state and local taxes, that have autonomy in their educational practices (Barr, Sadovnik, & Visconti, 2006; Green, Baker, & Oluwole, 2013; Knaak & Knaak, 2013). These schools generally offer alternative academic possibilities to their traditional counterparts and are a hybrid of public and private schools as they have autonomy but receive public funding (Brinig & Garnett, 2012). Charter schools operate independently from school districts, thus leading to diversity in their operation, mission, vision, and goals (Brinig & Garnett, 2012; California Charter Schools, 2013a; Koven, 2009). In order to receive the renewal of the charter to operate, charter school progress is assessed every five years (California Charter School, 2013a). Charter schools have smaller student enrollment rates, and all interested students may apply to them (Koven, 2009; California Charter Schools, 2014). Schools that have more

students interested in enrolling than they can accommodate conduct public lotteries to determine who will be allowed to enroll for the academic year (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Underrepresented students. Underrepresented students are students who historically have not had as much access to secondary and postsecondary education opportunities based on a combination of factors, including their community, parental education, race/ethnicity, and/or socioeconomic status (California Charter Schools, 2014). Often, these students rely on their schools to serve as their *social capital* to access higher education (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008).

College preparatory schools. College preparatory, for the purpose of describing high schools, refers to schools that provide their students with the preparation for higher education (Moore et al., 2010). Thus, these schools have an expectation for all of their students to attend college (Koven, 2009).

Dual enrollment. Dual enrollment or *concurrent enrollment* refers to the opportunity for high school students to enroll in a college course while they are in high school (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). Students receive college credit if they earn a grade of C or better in the courses and are able to transfer this credit to their future higher education institutions, depending on the academic policies at the campus (Martinez & Klopott, 2005).

Social capital. Social capital refers to the network and opportunities that open as a result of this network (Bryan et al., 2011; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008) define social capital as “the norms and information channels available through social relationships” (78). Social capital presents opportunities and assets to the individual as a result of its networks (Bryan et al., 2011; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008).

Tracking. Tracking refers to providing access to specific courses only to a select group

of students (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McClafferty et al., 2002). Schools create pathways for students based on the courses that they offer to specific groups at their schools and funnel them toward a vocational or college path (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Tracking sometimes happens through testing students and placing them into classes based on their performance levels, which may not always create access to courses desired by the students or courses that will prepare them for college (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McClafferty et al., 2002).

Persistence. Persistence refers to the progress toward graduation from an institution of higher education (College Board, 2009). Persistence also refers to student retention and student attrition, both in reference to the progress toward graduation of higher education institutions (Engle & Lynch, 2009).

Key Terms

The study refers to key terms as they present relevant information pertaining to this research.

College-going culture. College-going culture refers to environments that actively provide information, resources, and support to all students regarding postsecondary educational institutions (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; McClafferty et al., 2002). The information, resources, and support may be provided in formal and informal ways and settings; however it must be focused on further informing students about their postsecondary educational options and preparation (Aldana, 2013; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). A college-going culture is not impacted by the contexts and organizational structures of the institutions or organizations; instead it is focused on providing students with the readiness, support, and preparation to pursue higher education (Aldana, 2013; Corwin & Tierney, 2007). Environments

with a college-going culture provide students with academic support, plans for achieving college readiness, and comprehensive college counseling (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; McClafferty et al., 2002).

College preparatory. College preparatory as a key term refers to the preparation level students need for college (Moore et al., 2010). It also refers to making college an attainable expectation and opportunity for all students (Koven, 2009).

A-G course requirements. A-G course requirements refer to 15 yearlong courses that fall into one of the seven subject areas (University of California, n.d.). California students must complete courses at the high school level to be eligible to apply to a California State University or a University of California campus. Students must earn a C or better in each course in order to get A-G course credit when applying to the California State University or University of California systems (University of California, n.d.). The courses fall into the following seven subject areas: history/social science, English, mathematics, laboratory science, language other than English, visual and performing arts, and college-preparatory electives. In order for courses to be considered A-G, the high schools must submit all potential courses for approval to the University of California Office of the President for articulation (University of California, n.d.).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act was brought into effect in 2001 as an effort to close the achievement gap in public schools across the nation and provide more accountability to improve the education quality for all students (Gawlik, 2012; Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, n.d.). NCLB focuses on the accountability to allow students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to achieve proficiency on their academic subjects (Gawlik, 2012). Moreover, NCLB is rooted in the flexibility of school districts to appropriate their federal funds to address the academic achievement gap (Gawlik, 2012;

Stillings, 2006). In doing so, schools should focus on implementing research-based practices and also invite parents to have a choice in their students' education (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, n.d.).

California Master Plan for Higher Education. The California Master Plan for Higher education was enacted in 1960 to increase college access, quality, and equity for all Californians (Joint Committee, 2010). It is an agreement between the three public higher education systems in California: University of California, California State University, and California Community Colleges (Joint Committee, 2010).

Theoretical Framework Summary

The theoretical framework that guides this study is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which began as a model in 1977 (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977), ecological systems that are "nested within one another" shape human development (Neal & Neal, 2013). He further explains that human behavior cannot be defined merely by observation. Instead, human behavior and development is better understood when the multilayered contexts of the individuals is also considered (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Bronfenbrenner delineates the following four nested structures as ecological systems of human development: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. All five systems are further explained in Chapter Two of this study.

Given that students who are underrepresented fall under such a category based on their ecological systems, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides a lens to further understand how college access and persistence is shaped by contextual factors in the students' lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Engle & Lynch, 2009; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Moreover, creating college access for students overall requires multiple

layers and structures to function together within their context in school, community, and overall global society, especially for underrepresented students (Bryan et al., 2011; California Charter Schools, 2013c; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008;). Therefore, this theory will provide a frame to better understand the role of students' ecological systems as they prepare to access higher education.

Conceptual Framework Summary

The conceptual framework guiding this study is the Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture by Dr. Patricia McDonough and her team at the University of California, Los Angeles (MacDonald & Dorr 2006; McClafferty et al., 2002). The principles that they identify serve as indicators of a college-going culture in a high school. The framework for a college-going culture is built to serve as a way to evaluate current practices at the school and identify ways in which the facets of college preparation are being addressed (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006). Moreover, the foundation of the framework addresses the cultural component of college counseling. The framework consists of the following nine components which will be delineated in Chapter Two of this study:

1. College talk
2. Clear expectations
3. Information and resources
4. Comprehensive counseling model
5. Testing and curriculum
6. Faculty involvement
7. Family involvement
8. College partnerships

9. Articulation.

The Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture was selected as the conceptual framework because it informs the overarching components to cultivate a college-going culture in high schools. Moreover, the framework informs the research questions and interview questions for the study. The first research questions stem from the *Comprehensive Counseling Model* principle from the Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture. Finally, the Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture will support the interpretation of the themes discussed in Chapter Five.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following two research questions:

1. How do college counselors in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles describe the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of their school's college counseling program?

2. What do college counselors from college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles perceive as most important in a charter high school college-going culture to help underrepresented students with access to college and preparation to persist in higher education?

Delimitations

There were three delimitations to this study. The first pertains to the focus on charter high schools in Los Angeles that identify as college-preparatory. Second, the data collected was from the perspective of the college counselors. Lastly, the school was required to have had at least three to five graduating classes, to use A-G course requirements as part of their graduation requirements, and the person interviewed must have been at the school site for at least one academic year overseeing the day-to-day functions of the college counseling program.

Limitations

There were five limitations to this study. The first limitation pertains to the focus on the college counseling program at the schools as it did not account for other efforts happening at the high school sites that impact the university enrollment rates. The college counseling programs also did not account for other environmental factors at the high school sites that may either hinder or foster a stronger college-going culture. Furthermore, the study did not account for the availability of resources at each high school site and the level of expertise and experience that each person responsible for college counseling at the school may have. Moreover, the study did not account for the quality of college counseling provided to the students. Lastly, the sample size of the study represents only a limited cross section of the population of students enrolled in charter high schools; thus, the results and strategies identified in this study may not be assumed to be generalizable across other areas of the United States.

Assumptions

Five primary assumptions exist in this study. It was assumed that because of their nature, charter schools would have more potential to address the college access and persistence gap for underrepresented students. Secondly, it was assumed that, based on statistics, charter schools promote higher levels of student success (California Charter Schools, 2014; Koven, 2009). A tertiary assumption was that all of the schools have similar demographics of low-income students who have similar programmatic autonomy and would be first-generation higher education students. Fourth, it was assumed that the participants were truthful about their experiences, actions, and perceptions. Finally, it was assumed that the researcher did not influence or suggest bias in the participants' responses.

Organization of the Study

The research study is described across five chapters. This chapter provides an overview of the study including the need for the study, purpose of the study, operational definitions, key terms, research questions, limitations, delimitations, and assumptions of the study. Chapter Two includes a comprehensive review of what has been studied and what is known about the study focus and variables. Chapter Three describes the research design and the methodology used. Chapter Four presents the study findings. Finally, Chapter Five discusses the findings, presents conclusions, and makes recommendations for policy, practice, and further study.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was twofold: (a) to describe and compare the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of college counseling programs in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles as experienced and shared by high school college counselors and (b) to explore what those counselors perceive to be the most important components in fostering a college-going culture that will help underrepresented students gain access to college and prepare them to persist in higher education.

This study begins with an overview of relevant literature, beginning with research into college access for underrepresented secondary students, followed by a synthesis about college enrollment and persistence. A description of the theoretical framework, college counseling in high school, and the conceptual framework follows the overview of college access for underrepresented students (McClafferty et al., 2002). The review of the conceptual framework includes indicators of the principles and the ways in which they manifest within the school setting. Thereafter, the literature review proceeds to describe the components of college counseling programs and challenges to implementing these components. The literature review also includes historical background and pertinent information about charter schools overall and, more specifically, charter schools in Los Angeles. Lastly, the chapter summarizes literature on the following themes: college access counseling program goals, design, implementation, and outcomes; and college counselor perceptions regarding counseling program components that are most important in assisting underrepresented students access higher education.

Underrepresented Secondary Students and College Access

Students and families from underrepresented backgrounds often lack the knowledge or experience needed to have a general understanding of the college preparation and matriculation

process (McKillip, Rawls, & Barry, n.d.; Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Vargas, 2004). Thus, underrepresented students heavily rely on their schools for information and support to pursue higher education (Bryan et al., 2011; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). Schools and educators serve as social capital for underrepresented students and thus are critical in their college access and preparation (Bryan et al., 2011; California Charter Schools, 2013c; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Counselors in particular become a form of social capital that students and parents view as the all-knowing source for college preparation (Perna et al., 2008; Tedin & Weiher, 2011). The influence that counselors have on students' decision-making helps them push students to prepare academically to meet their aspirations (McDonough, 2004 as cited by Perna et al., 2008; McKillip et al., n.d.).

Bryan et al. (2011) explain that counselors highly influence the college decisions and preparation for Black and Latino students, yet those students are often the ones who struggle to have access to quality counselors who may have the expertise to guide them to higher education. Students from underrepresented backgrounds are more likely to attend schools where the support and guidance is limited (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Vargas, 2004). Students from underrepresented backgrounds may also have minimal access to one-on-one counseling due to large counselor-to-student ratios or competing priorities for counselors (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Vargas, 2004). Furthermore, families and students from underrepresented backgrounds also lack an understanding of the role of financial aid in the college process (Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Vargas, 2004). Families and students from underrepresented background are not informed that need-based financial aid exists to support students as they pursue higher education (Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Vargas, 2004). Finally, the families and students may not understand the importance of taking certain classes to increase

college-readiness or finding a college or university that is a good fit for the student academically and socially (Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Vargas, 2004).

Despite the knowledge gaps, students who engage in a conversation about college readiness and admission information with a knowledgeable individual are already increasing their opportunities to pursue college (Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Vargas, 2004). Thus, the college knowledge gap is not reflective of an insurmountable barrier; educators need to know that providing access to information is the foundation to motivating more underrepresented students to pursue higher education (Vargas, 2004). Furthermore, parents and families need to have a better understanding of financial aid opportunities to avoid misconceptions that the price of college is unaffordable (Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Vargas, 2004).

Because of limited college awareness and preparation, underrepresented students often opt to enroll in community colleges or less-selective universities (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Moreover, students from underrepresented backgrounds are less likely to be at a high school that prepares students for higher education (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Savitz-Romer, 2012a) or makes college counseling a priority (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008).

College Enrollment and Retention

The College Board (2009) and Clinedinst et al. (2013) suggest the number of students graduating from high schools across the United States continues to grow, and thus the application and enrollment rates in higher education institutions are also growing. Given the rise in admission applications and enrollment rates, fewer colleges opted to use waitlists for enrollment (Clinedinst et al., 2013). Despite the growth in admissions, students from low-income and/or black and Hispanic backgrounds continue to be underrepresented in private and four-year institutions (Clinedinst et al., 2013).

Community college pipeline. According to Perna et al. (2008), community college continues to be a popular option for students accessing higher education. They further emphasize the importance of higher education institutions collaborating with each other and with high schools to create seamless transitions for students and help them find campuses that will be academically and socially beneficial to their success (Perna et al., 2008). The strength of community college as a pathway to accessing higher education continues to vary across the United States (Bellafante, 2014; Koseff, 2014). In places like California, where more than 100 community colleges exist, the governor recently signed a bill to allow 15 of the colleges to award baccalaureate degrees (Koseff, 2014). California joins the 21 other states nationwide to implement this curriculum change and allow students to pursue baccalaureate degrees in vocational fields (Koseff, 2014). Therefore, community colleges in many states continue to be a viable route of access into higher education (California Community Colleges, 2012; Koseff, 2014; Perna et al., 2008). Additionally, California recently established the Student Success Act of 2012 signed by Governor Jerry Brown to reform academic initiatives and increase student educational outcomes (California Community Colleges, 2012).

Financial aid and tuition. Financial aid policies and changes in cost of attendance also influence college enrollment and retention rates. Savitz-Romer (2012a) and Vargas (2004) share that college costs and financial aid are two gatekeepers for underrepresented students accessing higher education. Similarly, McDonough (2004) shared that with increased tuitions and increased unmet financial need, college affordability continues to pose a challenge for underrepresented students. Radwin et al. (2013) found that 42% of college students receive student loans to pay for their education. Furthermore, Knapp et al. (2011), reported that tuition increased at four-year universities, including a 47% increase at public universities for in-state

students and 35% for out-of-state students. Thus, both the types of financial aid available to students and the tuition increases also play a role as macrosystems in college access and retention (Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Vargas, 2004).

Student retention. With increased enrollment rates, student retention rates in higher education institutions also have been raised (College Board, 2009). However, *U.S. News and World Report* (2014) recently shared that one in three students who begin as college freshmen do not return for their second year. Engle and Lynch (2009) further note that only 10% of low-income students, 20% of African American students, and 12% of Latino students graduate from higher education, compared to 76% of high-income students and 24% of white students. Moreover, Engle and Lynch (2009) explain that only 44% of students who begin college as freshmen attain their bachelor's degrees within six years, as opposed to 57% for all other students, including transfer students. The statistics about college retention for underrepresented students speak to the need for both K-12 and higher education institutions to focus their efforts on preparation that leads to greater student persistence (College Board, 2009; Engle & Lynch, 2009; Offenstien, Moore, & Shulock, 2010).

According to College Board (2009), higher education institutions across the United States continue to analyze student persistence toward graduation in hopes of finding solutions to sustain or increase retention rates. Higher education institutions have focused their efforts to increase student retention on programs such as new student orientations, coordinators or individuals who track student academic progress in classes, bolstering student-faculty interactions, and assigning academic advisors to students for their first year of college (College Board, 2009). The explanations behind the high attrition rate ranges from family problems to lack of social integration to academic struggles and financial barriers (College Board, 2009; *U.S. News &*

World Report, 2014).

The transition to college is crucial in student retention. Farmer-Hinton (2010) shares a model for retaining students in higher education through their first year of college: having someone at the high school that supports students throughout their first year of college. Programs like Summer Bridge act as a possible solution to help students with their transition from high school to college since these programs provide robust services to support students with the academic and social integration into higher education (Strayhorn, 2010). Moreover, dual enrollment also helps prepare students for the academic rigor of college courses and thus helps increase their persistence and retention (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). Martinez and Klopott (2005) propose that college outreach programs such as TRiO also support with increasing students' preparation to ultimately support their persistence in college.

Roderick et al. (2011) further explain that helping students find the best college match impacts their persistence, especially for students from low-income backgrounds. Thus, Roderick et al. (2011) suggest that schools engage students in college searches and help them find campuses that will be a match for them.

Theoretical Framework

To guide this study, Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory provides a lens to better understand how the contextual factors in students' lives influence their access to postsecondary education. His ecological systems theory stems from his view of human behavior as more complex and better understood through the multilayered contexts of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The theory is composed of the following four nested structures: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Neal & Neal, 2013). The theory has a fifth component, the chronosystem, which is not nested in the structure,

but still helps explain the ecological contexts that affect the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Microsystem. The microsystem within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory refers to the immediate context(s) that impacts the individual face to face (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The activities, factors, individuals, and/or settings in the microsystem more closely impact the individual. Some examples of the microsystem include the family, the school, and the peer group. In relation to this study, the microsystem for students pertains to their school, family, community, and peer group. Moreover, it is important that charter high schools have higher percentages of parental involvement because they are schools of choice (Archbald, 2004; Stillings, 2006; Tedin & Weiher, 2011; Toma & Zimmer, 2011). Parental involvement in students' lives in traditional public high schools, however, decreases by the time students enter high school (Education Week, 2004; Hickman, 2007). Given that parental involvement plays a crucial role in student success, charter high schools have the opportunity to be more successful because of higher parental involvement (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005; Stewart, 2008).

Mesosystem. The mesosystem refers to the interaction and relations between two or more of the activities, individuals, settings, and/or factors that fall within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory explains that these interactions and/or relations between the microsystems are part of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). For example, the interactions and relations may include those between home and school that impact how the student is held accountable on both ends and assumes responsibilities for actions. In this study, parental involvement appears as a main component of college counseling programs, thus requiring the interaction between the school and the home, or the parent or guardian and the college counselor to better support the student.

Exosystem. The exosystem within the ecological systems theory refers to the relationship between settings in which the individual is not part of at least one of the settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The relationship between the settings has an indirect, yet immediate influence on the individual. Examples of the exosystem include the interaction between the parent's workplace and the family or between the school and community partners. In both instances, the individual's development is indirectly affected through the interactions between these two settings. For the purpose of this study, an exosystem may be the interaction between the high schools and universities as this impacts student opportunities for early college programs, contact with representatives, and/or the possibility to pursue admission to these specific campuses.

Macrosystem. The macrosystem from the lens of the ecological systems theory refers to the overarching factors that influence the development of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Bronfenbrenner (1977) explains that the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem are all influenced by overarching systems in "reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life-styles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options that are embedded in each of these broader systems" (40). In this study, some of the macrosystems include policies that impact college access and persistence preparation, and/or the economic crisis in the U.S. that may impact access to resources and counselor-to-student ratios in the schools (Bryan et al., 2011; California Charter Schools, 2013c; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Additionally, increases in college enrollment and tuition prices for universities serve as macrosystems impacting college access (Radwin et al., 2013; Knapp et al., 2011).

Chronosystem. The fifth layer of the ecological systems theory, the chronosystem, is not

nested with the other systems as it is arching across each system (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The chronosystem accounts for the depth in each system and captures the changes that occur over time that are not reflected by the individual's age but rather by the environment or context. These changes may include a change in the family structure, a shift in the economic status of the individual, or changes in the demands of the workforce for a specific field. For the purpose of this study, one of the chronosystems to consider is the 2020 vision to increase the number of individuals with a college degree (Executive Office, 2014; Lumina, 2014; Moore et al., 2014;).

College Counseling in High Schools

The McClafferty et al.'s (2002) Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture and Corwin and Tierney's (2007) five aspects of college counseling inform the overarching components of college counseling in high schools. The Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture consists of: college talk, clear expectations, information and resources, comprehensive counseling model, testing and curriculum, faculty involvement, family involvement, college partnerships, and articulation. Similarly, Corwin and Tierney (2007) share that college counseling programs need to have "academic momentum, an understanding of how college plans develop, a clear mission statement, comprehensive college services, and coordinated and systematic college support" (133). The extent to which these factors exist in college counseling programs is impacted by the counselor-to-student ratio, involvement from all stakeholders, access to courses and services by all students, and strategic implementation of services that work in conjunction with one another to increase college access and enrollment (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Hill, 2008; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; McClafferty et al., 2002). Counselors have the responsibility to motivate, inform, and guide students in their college preparation, application, and matriculation journeys (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; McKillip et al., n.d.; National Association for College Admission Counseling,

2006; Savitz-Romer, 2012a).

According to Corwin and Tierney (2007), it is important to have college counseling services that are aligned to one another to have quality programming as isolated activities and events are not as effective. Avoiding isolated forms of college counseling services depends on the support from other stakeholders, including counselors, and structures in the schools. Moreover, insufficient funding for college-related activities also hinders the depth and quality of the college counseling programs in schools (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Hill, 2008). A high counselor-to-student ratio and isolated college services may mean that only a select number of students in schools have access to the services (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Farmer-Hinton, 2010). Farmer-Hinton (2010) and McDonough (2004) describe tracking for classes as a barrier to college-readiness and access. Corwin and Tierney (2007) further explain that tracking also happens in terms of overall college guidance and services as only a select number of students may access these services in schools where the counselor-to-student ratios are large and/or counselor have competing priorities.

Corwin and Tierney (2007) explain that college counseling should not fall only on college counselors, but rather on all stakeholders, including community members. Hill (2008) further supports Corwin and Tierney (2007), differentiating the roles of the teachers and the counselors on the college preparation process. Hill (2008) explains that teachers prepare students academically and counselors guide students with understanding, planning, and undertaking the application process. In settings where the responsibilities fall solely on the college counselor, schools risk having more isolated services and/or inducing more counselor burnout (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). Schools and counselors should also collaborate with community and university partners to expand their services and programs to students (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008;

McClafferty et al., 2002; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). Finally, parents are an important part of the stakeholders because they need to have the college knowledge and also need to collaborate to ensure that both the school and household support the students (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McClafferty et al., 2002; Savitz-Romer, 2012a).

Corwin and Tierney (2007) state that schools should allocate resources to their college counseling services and that the programs should have benchmarks by which they measure their progress and success in meeting their goals. Aldana (2013) shares that the limited resources in underfunded schools hinder all students' access to college information and preparation since this requires students to be more proactive, making those who are resilient the main benefactors of this structure. Given that schools have limited funding and do not assess the effectiveness of their college counseling programs, it is common for isolated counseling services to be implemented, thus leading to an ineffective college-going culture (Corwin & Tierney, 2007).

Conceptual Framework

In 2002, McClafferty and colleagues at the University of California, Los Angeles, spearheaded the *Creating a College Culture* project, a participatory action research study that led to the creation of the Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture. The project was designed as a way to address the decline of specific ethnic and racial groups in college enrollment (McClafferty et al., 2002). The framework emerged from the researchers' witnessing of principles that were evidently needed to create a college-going culture in schools (McClafferty et al., 2002). As mentioned above, the nine principles are college talk, clear expectations, information and resources, comprehensive counseling model, testing and curriculum, faculty involvement, family involvement, college partnerships, and articulation. These nine principles are further examined below.

College talk. College talk as the first principle refers to having conversations with students about their pathway to college (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; McClafferty et al., 2002). This conversation must be ongoing and provide clear insight about the college preparation and matriculation process (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; McClafferty et al., 2002). The communication in a school setting may be in the form of newsletters informing students about college, visible posters and newspapers, or activities that inform students about preparing, applying, and enrolling in college (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006). This can even come in the form of conversations between students and adults at their school who provide information about college (McClafferty et al., 2002).

Clear expectations. The second principle of a college-going culture is that of clear expectations (McClafferty et al., 2002). Thus, all students, parents, teachers, family, staff, and administrators should have clarity about their responsibilities to prepare students for college (McClafferty et al., 2002). This principle encompasses an understanding of the education options available to the student and consistently providing a reminder of these options (McClafferty et al., 2002). In a school setting, this may also take the form of a mission statement that promotes college preparation and access for all students (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; McClafferty et al., 2002). Moreover, an expectation must exist that all students will go to college and plans for each year of high school must outline how they will achieve this expectation (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006). Lastly, students should frequently be engaged in conversations about their college goals and preparation (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006).

Information and resources. The third principle, information and resources, refers to ensuring the students have the access to information and tools pertaining to preparation for college (McClafferty et al., 2002). The information and resources can range from college

pamphlets and college-test preparation materials to information about paying for higher education (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006). In order for the information and resources to be useful for students, it must be kept updated, and school staff and students alike should have knowledge of its availability (McClafferty et al., 2002).

Comprehensive counseling model. The fourth principle refers to the comprehensive counseling model (McClafferty et al., 2002). In schools where there is more than one counselor, all counselors assume the role of college counselors (McClafferty et al., 2002). Thus, every counselor should be informed and provide information and motivation to students to consider their college options, and all counseling conversations should bring college into the future plans for the student (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; McClafferty et al., 2002). Additionally, teachers and staff should also participate in providing college information to the students (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006).

Testing and curriculum. A school with a college-going culture would also address the fifth principle, testing and curriculum, through offering college-preparation courses and entrance examinations to all students (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006). This may mean providing the Preliminary SAT or other college entrance examination practice tests free of cost to all students before their 11th grade year (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006) and providing students with the necessary core classes in math and English and other subjects to fully prepare them for the content in the college-entrance exams (McClafferty et al., 2002).

Faculty involvement. The sixth principle of a college-going culture refers to having faculty involvement (McClafferty et al., 2002). Thus, it should not be just the counselors promoting college and engaging in the conversations about college; all teachers and staff must be informed and collaborate to inform students about college (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006). Some

indications that this principle is being followed in the school setting may be college conversations in class, college decorations in the classroom, teachers helping with test preparation, and active involvement with the counseling office (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006).

Family involvement. Family involvement is an essential feature of a college-going culture (McClafferty et al., 2002), and it refers to the schools creating opportunities to inform families about college and involve them in the process (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006). Families must understand their role in the college preparation process of their student, and the schools need to offer the information to parents through workshops, college fairs, or other college-knowledge activities that are accessible to them at various times of the day and week to accommodate all parents (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; Epstein, 2011).

College partnerships. Helping students prepare for college is a community effort (McClafferty et al., 2002). Thus, principle number eight speaks to college partnerships as essential for a college-going culture (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006). Schools cannot act alone in this process and must collaborate with universities and colleges to coordinate fieldtrips, representative visits to the high schools, or other college awareness and preparation opportunities (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006). Partnerships may also include outreach programs that further foster a college-going culture and offer services supplemental to those offered at the school to prepare students for college (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006).

Articulation. Finally, the ninth principle speaks to the collaboration between all K-12 feeder schools to create a seamless transition for students (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; McClafferty et al., 2002). Therefore, elementary schools must collaborate with middle schools and high schools and vice versa so that all of their activities, messaging, and expectations align even when students move between school levels (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006). The goal is

consistent communication for students through each grade level about preparing for college (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006).

Components of College Counseling Programs

McDonough (2004) describes four components as crucial in college counseling at the high school level, including a college-preparatory curriculum, the expectation for students to attend college and be informed about college, staff members who actively help students achieve their goals, and college advising and counseling resources. College counseling programs should also include a variety of counseling opportunities, including large group, small group, one-on-one, and parent-and-student sessions (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Hanselman, 2005; McDonough, 2004). Furthermore, every interaction with students should be proactive and engaging to help build relationships with the students to better support them (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Hanselman (2005), in a recommendation also outlined in the *college talk* principle from the Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture, suggests that schools host parent meetings, distribute newsletters and bulletins with college preparation information, and engage in frequent conversations regarding college (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; McClafferty et al., 2002). These conversations should include information regarding financial aid, given that students from underrepresented communities often perceive college as unaffordable (McDonough, 2004; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2006; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). According to Ensor (2005), effective college counseling programs should also incorporate presentations that discuss college preparation for students at each grade level, which reflects the college talk and access to information and resources principles as described by McClafferty et al. (2002).

Mission. Corwin and Tierney (2007) describe that a whole school mission focused on

college acts as a foundational factor for a college-going culture. In fact, most charter schools are mission-driven, and therefore it is important that schools act upon their college mission (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McDonough, 2004; Perna et al., 2008). Effective college counseling programs function from a lens of college being an expectation for all students as this increases students' likelihood to attend college (Bryan et al., 2011; Farmer-Hinton, 2010). Similarly, McClafferty et al. (2002) share that *clear expectations* as a principle is present in schools when an expectation exists for all students to attend college. Still, when implementing a college-preparatory construct to students, educators should mold their efforts based on their students to provide a comprehensive counseling model (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; McClafferty et al., 2002). As Farmer-Hinton (2010) describes "fix the construct of 'college-prep' to fit [the] student population instead of getting [the] students to fit the 'college-prep' construct" (590). In creating a culture that is college-prep, charter high schools have the responsibility of closing the gaps in their students' knowledge regarding their readiness for college-level curriculum and course expectations (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; McDonough, 2004).

De-tracking. Along with the expectation of *college for all*, schools should take actions such as de-tracking and offering rigorous coursework to all students (Farmer-Hinton, 2010). These factors are important and possible to perform in charter schools given their flexibility to be innovative (Farmer-Hinton, 2010). Charter schools offer a smaller student-to-teacher ratio, smaller counselor-to-student caseloads, classes that are part of the school day to prepare students for college, counseling after students graduate from high school, a focus on the college-talk principle, and opportunities that provide student exposure to higher education institutions (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McClafferty et al., 2002). As Perna et al. (2008) state, in traditional schools tracking often limits the quality of counseling and who

has access to college preparation information. Thus, Farmer-Hinton (2010) further explains the opportunity for charter schools to overcome tracking and provide equal opportunities for college-knowledge and preparation for all students. Per McDonough (2004), eliminating tracking provides access to services and information for all students, thus helping increase the number of underrepresented students who pursue higher education. Moreover, non-tracking aligns with the principles of *testing and curriculum* and *comprehensive counseling model* (McClafferty et al., 2002).

Small student-to-counselor ratio. In order to have an effective college counseling program, schools must have small counselor-to-student ratios (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McKillip et al., n.d.; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). This would allow the college counseling program to align to the *comprehensive counseling model* principle (McClafferty et al., 2002). High student-to-counselor ratio affects the quality of counseling that the counselors are able to provide to students, especially when counselors have responsibilities beyond college counseling that may not allow for a comprehensive college model (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McClafferty et al., 2002; Perna et al., 2008). Because students require individualized academic and college counseling to effectively prepare for higher education, the small student-to-counselor ratio further supports students' access to higher education (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McKillip et al., n.d.; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a).

Some of the models for charter school college counseling programs include a counselor who stays with students each year of high school until the end of the students' first year in college (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Perna et al., 2008). The transition from high school to college remains a difficult one for underrepresented students, thus they heavily rely on their schools to

provide this support; having a person at the school who can support them with this process will begin to address this problem (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Additionally, part of having a *comprehensive counseling model* as suggested by McClafferty et al. (2002), means college matching will be a part of the college counseling program (Ensor, 2005; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). Students should be linked to colleges that will offer them the support needed, financial aid, and provide a space that makes them comfortable as students (Ensor, 2005).

College advisory classes. Furthermore, Farmer-Hinton (2010) and Corwin and Tierney (2007) suggest that college counseling programs may also incorporate a college advisory/preparation/knowledge-building type of class that informs students about college and helps them prepare for it. The college advisory class will promote *college talk* per the Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture and engage teachers, therefore providing *faculty involvement* (McClafferty et al., 2002). As Bryan et al. (2011) suggest, offering college counseling to students by the tenth grade serves as an advantage as they prepare for college. Thus, the college advisory classes may be helpful beginning in ninth grade (Bromberg & Theokas, 2014; McKillip et al., n.d.; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2006). This information may also be offered as curriculum embedded in a class that addresses college preparation (Perna et al., 2008). These classes would build on one another, where the focus for ninth- and tenth-grade students would be to learn study skills, to transition to college, to explore careers, to create a course and career plan, to improve test-taking skills, and to participate in summer college enrichment opportunities (Ensor, 2005; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Hanselman, 2005). Meanwhile, in the eleventh and twelfth grades, students would focus on applications, writing college essays, taking college entrance exams, summer internships, and college tours (Ensor, 2005; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Hanselman,

2005). Overall, the classes align to the principle of *information and resources, college talk, and clear expectations*, therefore further strengthening the college-going culture (McClafferty et al., 2002).

In these college advisory courses, students should receive clear information of the matriculation process from high school to college and also the transfer pathway from community college to a four-year university (Campaign, 2005; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2006). The support students receive in their classes should also include building a college list (McDonough, 2004; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2006). In college advisory classes, students may put together a portfolio that includes their résumés and previous involvement in activities that help them with their preparation and transition into higher education (Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a).

Because insufficient information regarding financial aid may be a barrier for underrepresented students, college advisory classes should also include information for students about financial aid (Perna et al., 2008). The *access to information and resources* principle, as it pertains to financial aid, demystifies perceived notions of college being too expensive (McClafferty et al., 2002). In California, this includes teaching students about the Cal Grant, a free source of aid based on students' academic grade point average (GPA) and their family income (Perna et al., 2008). Counselors may provide financial aid and general information to teachers to allow them to share this information with students and maximize the collective capacity in the schools (Perna et al., 2008). While teachers will provide general financial aid information, counselors will be able to provide more one-on-one help as needed on financial aid applications, such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA; Perna et al., 2008). With such collaboration, the school engages in involving faculty, providing *clear expectations*

and engaging in *college talk* as outlined by the Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture (McClafferty et al., 2002).

Celebration and visibility students' college admissions and students matriculating in higher education further support the college-going culture in campuses (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; McClafferty et al., 2002). By having celebrations and visible recognition of students' accomplishments, schools further add to the *college talk* in a way that is positive and creates optimism for students about their own college goals.

Build self-sufficiency. In addition, it is important for schools to help students build self-sufficiency (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). Part of helping students become self-sufficient is addressing their fears and helping them build their confidence levels prior to the end of high school (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). However, while teaching students self-sufficiency is important, it should be taught in a way that still supports the students and does not allow them to fail (Farmer-Hinton, 2010). By supporting students with building their self-confidence, teachers also engage and further cultivate a college-going culture per the Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture (McClafferty et al., 2002; Savitz-Romer, 2012a).

Partnership with higher education institutions. Partnerships with colleges, as McClafferty et al. (2002) state, strengthen the college-going culture in the school. Schools at all levels from preschool through undergraduate institutions should collaborate to align their curriculum to better prepare students for the rigor of college (Campaign, 2005; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). Moreover, alignment should also exist between assessment tests and the students' learning in P-12 (Perna et al., 2008). McDonough (2004) shares that partnership between higher education and K-12 schools is especially important to low-income and minority students because of the outreach programs that the colleges and universities may offer.

Early college opportunities. Concurrent enrollment in college classes may further support students in increasing their success in higher education (Campaign, 2005; McClafferty et al., 2002). Having opportunities for students to take classes at a college aligns with the *testing and curriculum*, and *articulation* principles of a college-going culture (McClafferty et al., 2002).

Parental involvement. According to Tedin and Weiher (2011), parental involvement in the college counseling process increases the students' level of achievement. McClafferty et al. (2002) in their Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture also outline *family involvement*, referring to parental guidance, as crucial in the college counseling process. Tedin and Weiher (2011) also express that parental involvement increases with school choice, as in the case of students enrolled in charter schools. Parental involvement for underrepresented students should be a partnership in which families support the academic preparation of students (McDonough, 2004). Furthermore, parental involvement, in conjunction with counselor support, also leads to students feeling more motivated to pursue college (Bryan et. al., 2011; Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009). Finally, Savitz-Romer (2012a) and Corwin and Tierney (2007) explain that parental involvement, especially for underrepresented students, is key in increasing students' likelihood of pursuing higher education. Given that the parents may lack college knowledge and an understanding of financial resources available for higher education, their involvement in the college preparation process will further support the students with building confidence and motivation to go to college (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Savitz-Romer, 2012a).

Challenges of College Counseling Programs

Adequate college preparation continues to be a challenge that is not fully addressed by college counseling programs (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). While counselors may be available to students at the schools and are knowledgeable and/or willing to support students

with their college preparation, competing priorities and the large counselor-to-student ratios challenge them (Bryan et al., 2011; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Perna et al., 2008).

Competing priorities. College counselors depending on the school and charter organization may have competing priorities that hinder their effectiveness with the college counseling process (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; McKillip et al., n.d.; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2006; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). The competing priorities may include counselor responsibilities such as test administration, reporting data to others, focusing on students' mental health issues, and managing other projects outside of college counseling due to staff shortages in the schools (Perna et al., 2008). Although the schools providing necessary tests for students aligns with the *testing and curriculum* principle, it also creates a competing priority when the counselor is the person responsible for this project (McClafferty et al., 2002; Perna et al., 2008).

Counselor-to-student ratio. Because students from underrepresented backgrounds heavily rely on counselors for support, the counselor-to-student ratio is important (Bryan et al., 2011; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Lapan, Whitcomb, & Aleman, n.d.; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). Bryan et al. (2011) suggest that students from underrepresented backgrounds typically attend schools where the counselors' larger caseloads may not allow them to engage in college counseling with all of their students. Thus, large counselor-to-student-ratios interfere with counselors' ability to provide a *comprehensive counseling model* as described by the Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture (McClafferty et al., 2002; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). It is therefore important that schools consider ways to reduce the counselor-to-student ratio to increase college access for all students.

Charter Schools

Charter schools serve as an alternative form of public school education that may help address the college access gap in the United States (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). The concept of charter schools emerged in 1991 when Minnesota passed its first law in favor of charter schools during the midst of the school choice movement as an opportunity for families to send their students to schools that meet their educational needs (Henig, Holyoke, Brown, & Lacireno-Paquet, 2005; Smith, Wohlstetter, Farrell, & Nayfack, 2011; Toma & Zimmer, 2011). *School choice* refers to a government policy that provides parents the option to decide on the schools for their children as a way to address social-class stratification and segregation in schools (Archbald, 2004; Tedin & Weiher, 2011; Toma & Zimmer, 2011). The dissatisfaction with the existing education system gave light to other alternatives for public schooling (Barr et al., 2006; Tedin & Weiher, 2011; Toma & Zimmer, 2011). Charter schools came out of this turning point in education (Barr et al., 2006; Tedin & Weiher, 2011; Toma & Zimmer, 2011). However, it was not until 1992 that the first charter school opened (Barr et al., 2006; Tedin & Weiher, 2011; Toma & Zimmer, 2011). Now, 22 years later, more than 5,000 charter schools have been established nationwide, with the greatest influx in Los Angeles, California (California Charter Schools, 2013c).

Charter schools were regarded for innovative strategies to educational practices, along with having high accountability to the state, their local district, students, parents, and community members (Stillings, 2006; Toma & Zimmer, 2011). With the passing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, charter schools shifted their focus to core subjects and their instructional content (Gawlik, 2012; Stillings, 2006). In fact, according to Gawlik (2012), charter schools are held to higher accountability than traditional public schools despite varying implementation of

NCLB across school sites. Despite having to comply with NCLB, charter schools continue to be creative with their leadership and organizational structures (Stillings, 2006). Moreover, charter schools still remain autonomous regarding how they teach and evaluate student learning, yet they are held accountable for their performance on standardized state and federal tests (Stillings, 2006).

NCLB's accountability for charter school performance has created pressure for charter school teachers to modify or replace their creative instructional practices and limit their curriculum to prepare students for the annual state standardized tests (Gawlik, 2012). While teachers may still implement project-based learning and creative activities in their curriculum, they feel immense pressure to balance the demands of NCLB and maintaining the autonomy of charter schools (Gawlik, 2012). Still, charter schools and their teachers have shown they can effectively use data to make decisions and improve their practices (Gawlik, 2012).

Parents, members from the community, educators, and others supported the growth of charter schools and committed to closing schools that do not perform highly (Stillings, 2006). As described by Stillings (2006), different entities fund charter schools depending on the state, and generally several state and local governing bodies determine the eligibility of a charter to be opened and to remain open after each three-to-five-year performance evaluation. Thus, as with traditional public schools, their open status is contingent upon their performance as prescribed by the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a national set of standards to assess schools' academic performance (Stillings, 2006).

According to Smith et al. (2011) and Stillings (2006), charter schools were established to be autonomous and innovative schools whose early success was measured based on students' results on standardized tests and meeting the agreements of their charter. Charter schools

symbolize school reform with their innovative practices and autonomy from bureaucratic structures, yet they still face challenges similar to those of traditional public schools (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). More recently, more studies have been conducted on charter schools to further measure their success and find models that can be replicated with the goal of closing the existing student achievement gap (Smith et al., 2011; Stillings, 2006). While charter schools still remain a controversial topic, their survival no longer remains in question (Smith et al., 2011). Rather the focus has shifted to strengthening them, including considering the management of the charter and the educational programs offered (Smith et al., 2011). Above all, the charter school movement has also shifted to accountability for charters and the approval for who can open them (Stillings, 2006; Smith et al., 2011).

At the local level, charter schools are also held accountable by students' parents and community members (Stillings, 2006). Both entities support the schools' existence and are invested in seeing results that may not be provided by traditional public schools (Stillings, 2006; Gawlik, 2012). With more than 20 years in existence, charter schools remain appealing to policymakers, educators, community members, families, and students because of their accountability, innovation, autonomy, academic results, and college-going rates (Gawlik, 2012).

Charter school criticisms. Charter schools encounter fiscal and logistical challenges, especially during their early years of establishment (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Charters schools struggle to find the space to implement their missions as new schools (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Moreover, new charter schools have high turnover rates in their staffing that can cause counselors to take on additional responsibilities to support the challenges of the organization (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). The lottery system practiced by some charter schools also poses challenges because students are entering the

schools with varied needs and academic backgrounds (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Although this is true also for traditional public schools, most of the traditional public schools have feeder schools from which they enroll their students. Also, given that charter schools require more parental involvement because these are schools of choice and parents must make the choice to enroll their students, student success in charter schools may be impacted by their involvement (Archbald, 2004; Tedin & Weiher, 2011; Toma & Zimmer, 2011; Stillings, 2006). Finally, the California Charter Schools Association (2013c) also indicates that charter schools belonging to an organization that has previously established another charter school have higher academic performance. Thus, charter schools that begin without an umbrella organization struggle with implementing the innovative and quality curriculum and programming they were intended to offer.

Charter high schools. Charter high schools may be challenged because they do not have feeder schools from which they receive their students, especially if the school is using a lottery system to make up its enrollment (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Thus, charter schools may be enrolling students with a range of needs, which also translates into a need to provide even more personalized academic and college support for students. According to Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008), counselors at charter high schools are then charged to “developing college bound students” although the students may not have clarity on their college goals and aspirations (85). While in their early years charter schools struggle to successfully impact student achievement, with time, many outperform their public school counterpart (California Charter Schools, 2014). Charter high schools are particularly successful in the college-going rate and in serving underrepresented students, especially in California (California Charter Schools, 2013a; California Charter Schools, 2014).

Charter Schools in Los Angeles

Los Angeles County has the highest density of charter schools in the country (Koven, 2009; California Charter Schools, 2013c). The county has a total of 329 charter schools, of which 262 are located in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD); and Inglewood Unified School District has the second largest number with 11 schools (C. Obringer, personal communication, June 3, 2014). Furthermore, Pasadena Unified has seven, and William S. Hart Union High School District has six schools that are classified as charter schools. The remaining 20 school districts in Los Angeles County have four or fewer charter schools. Charter schools in LAUSD continue to outperform their traditional public school counterparts (California Charter Schools, 2013c).

Along with their success, charter schools have also been highlighted for their failures and areas of growth. Despite their autonomy, charter schools are also held accountable for complying with their measures and with state and federal requirements (Gawlik, 2012; Stillings, 2006). Moreover, charter schools that fail to meet the accountability measures of their charter are closed (Gawlik, 2012; Stillings, 2006). The California Charter Schools Association (2013c) requires that schools have an Annual Performance Index score above the 25th percentile of all California schools for that given year of renewal, a minimum growth of 50 points on their API over the course of three cumulative years, or score within or above for two of the previous three years in their Similar Students Measure (SSM) band (California Charter Schools, 2013a). In 2010, the California Charter Schools Association (2013c) did not approve the renewal of 10 schools for failing to meet three or more renewal expectations. Charter schools are also criticized for their lower enrollment of students with disabilities (California Charter Schools, 2014). Charter high schools in Los Angeles on average have a lower number of students with disabilities than

traditional high schools (California Charter Schools, 2014).

Charter high schools in Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, 95% of the students served by charter schools are from underrepresented backgrounds based on free/reduced lunch eligibility and their average parent education being less than high school completion (California Charter Schools, 2014). Still, charter schools in Los Angeles have an average of 73% of their students completing A-G requirements, compared to 14% at traditional public schools (California Charter Schools, 2014). Moreover, 80% of students who start high school during their ninth grade year graduate within four years, compared to 66% at their traditional counterparts (California Charter Schools, 2014a).

Counseling Programs in Charter High Schools

Charter schools vary in their enrollment, structures, and resources, but they all have smaller student populations than traditional public schools (Gawlik, 2012). Given such, they have experienced success in serving underrepresented students as it pertains to college access (California Charter Schools, 2013c).

Serving underrepresented students. Given that charter schools have smaller student populations, it is more manageable to cater to individual student needs (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). Students who are from underrepresented backgrounds more frequently rely on their schools to provide them with the college knowledge and preparation to pursue higher education; thus the small size of charter high schools allows students to receive this specialized support (Bryan et al., 2011; California Charter Schools, 2013c; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). However, having counselors in charter schools help with the daily functions of the schools as a result of understaffing affects their ability to provide the emotional, social, and academic support that students from underrepresented backgrounds need (Farmer-Hinton &

McCullough, 2008). Savitz-Romer (2012a) shares that helping students from underrepresented backgrounds access higher education requires more complex support because of their limited college knowledge, often low expectations, and misconceptions about college and because of the need to also educate and empower the families about higher education (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Savitz-Romer, 2012a)

Program goals. The overarching goal of a college counseling program is to increase the enrollment rates of students pursuing higher education. To achieve such an overarching goal, counseling programs, especially in schools with students from underrepresented backgrounds, should consider the following goals: (a) increase students' knowledge about college, (b) help students learn to advocate for themselves, (c) increase students' financial aid awareness, (d) educate families about college and financial aid, (e) involve families in the college process, and (f) establish a culture of high student expectations (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Hanselman, 2005; McClafferty et al., 2002; McDonough, 2004; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2006; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). Furthermore, the National Association for College Admission Counseling (2006), Perna et al. (2008), and Savitz-Romer (2012a) highlight that counseling programs should establish individualized college counseling for students as a goal to increase student access to higher education. Finally, Perna et al. (2008) and McKillip et al. (n.d.) emphasize that college counseling programs should have policies and structures that support student access to college—not hinder it. Overall, the policies and structures for the school and the college counseling program should focus on providing equitable access and services to all students (McKillip et al., n.d.; Perna et al., 2008).

Program design. According to Aldana (2013) and Corwin and Tierney (2007), a college counseling program must provide equitable access to opportunities, information, and activities for all students. Moreover, all adults at the school must actively promote these opportunities and information to students and their families because they see college as a possibility for all students (Aldana, 2013; Corwin & Tierney, 2007). Corwin and Tierney (2007) further share that college counseling programs that are successful include “academic momentum, an understanding of how college plans develop, a clear mission statement, comprehensive college services, and coordinated and systematic college support” (133). MacDonald and Dorr (2006) share that access to rigorous courses, high expectations for students, in-depth and consistent college counseling, timely delivery of college information, and parental involvement cultivate a strong college-going culture (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Hanselman, 2005; McClafferty et al., 2002; McDonough, 2004; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2006; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) and Corwin and Tierney (2007) add that isolated activities in the schools are ineffective; thus activities, initiatives, and factors of college counseling programs should all correlate and function together.

Program implementation. MacDonald and Dorr (2006) and Perna et al. (2008) suggest that a counseling program implementation involves setting high expectations for students to succeed in a college-preparatory curriculum, all adults on campus dedicated to support students as they prepare for college, an expectation that all students will attend college, and frequent communication that informs students and families about college expectations (Bromberg & Theokas, 2014). Moreover, the National Association for College Admission Counseling (2006) and McKillip et al. (n.d.) also share that clarity on counselor roles and responsibilities as it

pertains to their focus being counseling versus administrative duties will further increase the effectiveness of college counseling programs. Additionally, McKillip et al. (n.d.), Engberg and Gilbert (2012), and Perna et al. (2008) stress the importance of having school-wide structures and policies that support students and not serve as gatekeepers in their pursuit of higher education.

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (2006), Perna et al. (2008) and Savitz-Romer (2012a) indicate that small counselor-to-student ratios are important to implement an effective college counseling program (Bryan et al., 2011; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Lapan et al., n.d.). Perna et al. (2008) share that the counselor-to-student ratios drive the quality of the college counseling program because this defines the time counselors spend providing individualized and active forms of college counseling for the students and the families. Furthermore, the implementation of college counseling is more successful when both teachers and counselors see themselves as and act as college counselors (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; Savitz-Romer, 2012b). Perna et al. (2008) suggest that teachers may integrate limited college counseling in their classes to further support the counselor-to-student ratios and have school-wide involvement in college counseling. Finally, college counseling programs should be holistic in their services and begin in the ninth grade in order to truly be effective (Bromberg & Theokas, 2014).

Program outcomes. College counseling programs focus on increasing the number of students accessing higher education, increasing the college knowledge and preparation for students and their families, preparing students for the academic rigor of college, and creating an overall culture of the expectation that all students will pursue higher education. (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Hanselman, 2005; McClafferty et al., 2002;

McDonough, 2004; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2006; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). Thus, Perna et al. (2008) suggest that higher education enrollment and types of institutions in which the students enroll serve as key outcomes to college counseling programs (Engberg & Gilbert, 2012). Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) and Stephan and Rosenbaum (2012) argue that building relationships between students and staff members is a key goal in college counseling programs as the relationships further increase social capital that supports students with accessing higher education. Additionally, Bromberg and Theokas (2014) suggest that the school should also increase the number of students in higher-level courses that challenge students academically to improve their college readiness, especially as shown through college entrance examinations. Overall, the overarching outcome from college counseling programs is to increase the number of students entering four-year universities prepared for college-level expectations (Bromberg & Theokas, 2014; McDonough, 2004; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2006; Perna et al., 2008).

Counselors in Charter High School College Counseling Programs

McClafferty et al. (2002) suggest that a college-going culture incorporates comprehensive college counseling requiring all counselors to be college counselors. Thus, counselors provide opportunities, programs and information for students and their families to understand and pursue higher education. Hill (2008) explains that counselors should focus on guiding students in understanding the planning and application process of college; meanwhile teachers should provide the academic preparation needed for college admission.

Roles and responsibilities. The counselors in charter high schools oversee the college programming of their respective schools (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). Their roles and responsibilities include providing direct individual college counseling, facilitating workshops for

students and families, coordinating fieldtrips to college campuses, and supporting students before and during the college application process (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2000, 2006; Savitz-Romer, 2012a, 2012b). Stephan and Rosenbaum (2012) and Savitz-Romer (2012a) describe that having individuals at the school designated to focus on college programming, such as school-wide fieldtrips, college fairs and workshops, helping students prepare for college, proactively seeking out students in order to discuss the college enrollment process, and actively building relationships with their students helps cultivate a stronger college-going culture. Depending on the school, the counselors may also advise students on their course selection and access programs that prepare them for college (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). Because many counselor preparation programs do not prepare counselors for college advising through their coursework, it is important that counselors attend professional development conferences and activities to further increase their skills and knowledge (McClafferty et al., 2002; National Association for College Admissions Counseling, 2006). Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) suggest that counselors act from the ethic of care to provide an environment that is conducive to relationship-building with the students.

Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008) suggest that students in schools where counselors focus mainly on college activities and limit their time on other unrelated responsibilities are more successful in providing college guidance. The role of counselors should incorporate working with students on their college plans beginning in the ninth grade (Bromberg & Theokas, 2014; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McKillip et al., n.d.; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008) further argue that counselors in charter schools should focus on college counseling, have smaller student caseloads, and support families and students in their

college-decision making. Finally, Stephan and Rosenbaum (2012) similar to Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008), suggest that informing the students and families about financial aid for college should be a primary focus for counselors when helping students prepare for college.

Qualifications. In 2000, the National Association for College Admissions Counseling released a statement on counselor competencies in regard to college counseling. According to this statement, counselor competencies include, but are not limited to, providing individual and group counseling, having awareness and sensitivity to students' needs, having effective communication with students, teachers, parents, college representatives and other community stakeholders, disseminating and presenting college information and trends, making data-driven decisions, coordinating events that increase college awareness, helping students maximize their potential, and supporting students and their families through the overall college preparation, application, and enrollment process (National Association for College Admissions Counseling, 2000). Moreover, Savitz-Romer (2012b) describes college counseling as an interdisciplinary field that requires professionals to draw on skills and knowledge from psychology, career development, sociology, economy, and education. Counselors should actively recruit students and help them understand the importance of peer networks in their success (Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2012).

Savitz-Romer (2012a) indicates that counselor graduate training currently lacks coursework and experiential components that prepare counselors to help students and families through the college process. Thus, counselor training should include coursework and practice with helping students and families access higher education. Counselors should be willing to learn and partake in opportunities that allow them to build their knowledge and skills to better serve students and their families (McClafferty et al., 2002). Moreover, Savitz-Romer (2012a) and

Engberg & Gilbert (2012) indicate that the college counseling training should include an emphasis on urban education and the ecological contexts of students to better support students from inner-city communities. College counselors need to be able to make college discussions culturally relevant and consider the context, knowledge, and perceptions that parents and students have about college as they make this process personal, realistic, and feasible (Engberg & Gilbert, 2012; McClafferty et al., 2002). Furthermore, counselors should be able to provide personalized college counseling to students and their families in order to make the conversations culturally relevant and because of the complexity of college counseling, especially for underrepresented students (McClafferty et al., 2002; Savitz-Romer, 2012b). Finally, counselors should have access to in-service and preservice training opportunities to continue developing their college counseling expertise (Savitz-Romer, 2012b).

Challenges related to serving underrepresented students. The community and/or individuals who work with the students or the students themselves may have low expectations about their ability to pursue higher education (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Therefore, the one-on-one counseling needed by students is not solely for the purpose of receiving information and guidance; rather, students from underrepresented backgrounds often also require socio-emotional support that allows them to further build their confidence in pursuing higher education (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Counselors also encounter the challenge of larger caseloads that inhibit their ability to engage in personalized one-on-one college counseling with students (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). The time needed by students may not be feasible in schools where counselors help with the infrastructural challenges and thus have limited time to work with students (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Stephan and Rosenbaum (2012) indicate that counselors' competing priorities—such as

scheduling students in classes, providing crisis counseling, and engaging in school discipline and supervision—are conflicting roles and responsibilities for counselor. Given that students rely on social capital provided by their schools to learn about higher education, the social capital may be either at low volumes or counterfeit because of the minimal expectations that staff members have for students (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2012).

Furthermore, students from underrepresented backgrounds require more monitoring of their college preparation progress since their parents may also have limited knowledge about college preparation and matriculation (Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2012). Counselors who work with students from underrepresented backgrounds cannot rely on implementing standard counseling models because their students require more support than that suggested by the models (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2012). Lastly, counselors should thoroughly involve and invest parents in the college preparation, application, and enrollment process to better support the students (McClafferty et al., 2002; Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2012)

Summary

The review of the literature pertaining to cultivating an effective college counseling program in college-preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles provides building blocks for examining the design and implementation of college counseling services for underrepresented students (Bryan et al., 2011; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Hanselman, 2005; McClafferty et al., 2002; McDonough, 2004; Perna et al., 2008; Tedin & Weiher, 2011). Charter schools are charged to be innovative and have the flexibility to incorporate initiatives and offer more intensive support than may be feasible in traditional high schools to prepare students for college (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough,

2008). Charter high schools in Los Angeles more successfully prepare and send underrepresented students into higher education when compared with their traditional high school counterparts (California Charter Schools, 2014). Effective college counseling programs would include an array of components that all function together to strengthen the college-going culture as also outlined in the Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture (McClafferty et al., 2002). Thus, counselors in charter schools have the opportunity to provide more individualized college counseling given their smaller counselor-to-student ratios (Farmer-Hinton, 2010). The experiences of counselors in charter high schools compared to public high schools is distinct given the counselor-to-student ratio and flexibility that charter schools have to be innovative (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Still, it is important that counselors who work with students from underrepresented backgrounds be sensitive to the contexts of the students and families that they serve (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2006; Savitz-Romer, 2012a)

The most successful counseling goals, design, implementation, and outcomes include involving faculty, staff members, and parents in the college counseling process, providing access to a college-preparatory courses, setting college as an expectation for all students, providing individualized college counseling, and implementing a comprehensive college counseling model (Bryan et al., 2011; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Hanselman, 2005; McClafferty et al., 2002; McDonough, 2004; Perna et al., 2008; Tedin & Weiher, 2011). Given that charter schools have more flexibility, it is also crucial for them to further support students with their college preparation through college advisory classes that increase college knowledge and readiness (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Stillings, 2006; Toma & Zimmer, 2011). Moreover, the literature recommends that schools align their academic curriculum with feeder

schools and universities to ensure that academic rigor exists in the schools (Campaign, 2005; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Perna et al., 2008).

The recommendations for building a college counseling program at charter high schools in Los Angeles that cater to underrepresented students align with the indicators provided by the Nine Principle of a College-Going Culture framework (McClafferty et al., 2002). The *college talk* principle permeates through the literature as underrepresented students primarily rely on their counselors and other educators to share information and provide help to pursue college (California Charter Schools, 2013a; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Hanselman, 2005; McClafferty et al., 2002).

As schools cultivate effective college counseling programs, counselor preparation and experience with college counseling also impacts the quality of the program (Engberg & Gilbert, 2012; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2000, 2006; Savitz-Romer, 2012a, 2012b; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2012). Counselors' preparation to support students and their families in the college counseling process includes a myriad of skills and knowledge such as financial aid; culturally sensitive training; disseminating and presenting information; developing and evaluating programs, events, and activities to create a college-going culture; and collaborating with parents, teachers, community partners, universities, and other stakeholders (Engberg & Gilbert, 2012; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2000, 2006; Savitz-Romer, 2012a, 2012b; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2012).

Overall, the literature provides a foundation for the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes that are critical in college counseling programs to help underrepresented students at charter high schools in Los Angeles prepare to pursue and persist in higher education (Bryan et al., 2011; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Hanselman, 2005;

McClafferty et al., 2002; McDonough, 2004; Perna et al., 2008; Tedin & Weiher, 2011). Finally, the literature suggests goals, design, implementation, and outcomes for college counseling programs that align with the Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture, and charter schools in general have the opportunity to implement these principles more fully given their ability to be innovative, to understand the contexts of their students, and to cater to a smaller population (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bryan et al., 2011; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Hanselman, 2005; McClafferty et al., 2002; McDonough, 2004; Perna et al., 2008; Tedin & Weiher, 2011).

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter presents the detailed methodology for the study and begins with an introduction, followed by the research methodology and rationale, setting, population, sample and sampling procedures, human subjects consideration, instrumentation, data collection and procedures, data management, data analysis and reporting, positionality and concludes with a summary of the methods

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was twofold: (a) to describe and compare the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of college counseling programs in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles as experienced and shared by high school college counselors and (b) to explore what those counselors perceive to be the most important components in fostering a college-going culture that will help underrepresented students gain access to college and prepare them to persist in higher education.

The study examined participant information in an effort to inform the following two research questions:

1. How do college counselors in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles describe the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of their school's college counseling program?

2. What do college counselors from college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles perceive as most important in a charter high school college-going culture to help underrepresented students with access to college and preparation to persist in higher education?

Overview of Chapter Content and Organization

The chapter provides detailed information regarding the proposed research methodology and rationale and proceeds by sharing the validity of the study's design, setting for the study,

target population, sample criteria, sampling procedures, and human subject considerations.

Moreover, the chapter includes information regarding the instrumentation, including information about its validity. Finally, the chapter provides information about the data collection procedures, management, analysis, and reporting, and the researcher's positionality on the study.

Research Methodology and Rationale

This research study is qualitative in design and utilizes a phenomenological methodology in order to explore the experiences and perspectives of charter high school college counselors in Los Angeles area charter high schools regarding how charter school college counseling programs serve underrepresented students to better ensure college access and persistence. Individual in-depth interviews with high school college counselors served as the means of data collection.

Qualitative research is described as an “interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3. as cited in Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research is appropriate for studies that seek to explore a problem or issue in which the researchers cannot easily measure the variables. Creswell (2007) says that qualitative research involves data collection in a natural setting and considers the researchers’ “political, social or cultural context” (45). Furthermore, qualitative research encourages the participants to share their stories, experiences and/or perspectives on a problem or issue (Creswell, 2007). A qualitative research design for this study encourages college counselors to share their perspectives and experiences with college counseling programs and college-going cultures at their respective schools. The nature of qualitative research being exploratory, considering theoretically and conceptual frameworks to give meaning to participant responses and empowering participants to share their perspective allowed the researcher to further explore college counseling programs and college-going cultures in college-preparatory charter high

schools in Los Angeles, California.

Phenomenological methodology is a qualitative research method that aims to understand a phenomenon based on a description from the researcher's point of view and the participants' lived experience and perspective (Creswell, 2014; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Given that phenomenological studies focus on describing a phenomenon based on a person's perspective, the researcher selected the method for this study (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). This study sought to understand college counseling programs in college-preparatory charter high schools and the college-going culture of college-preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles from the perspective of the college counselors in these schools.

Interviews are a form of data collection that involve the researcher questioning participants to address a problem (Creswell, 2007). The interview responses are then transcribed and analyzed by the researcher to draw conclusions from the themes found. For the purpose of qualitative research, interviews are open-ended with semi-structured questions (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). The researcher creates follow-up questions during the interview to clarify or gather more information (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Interviews provide an advantage for the researcher to understand the context of the phenomenon without observation (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, interviews give the researcher control in the order of questioning about the phenomenon and understanding any of its historical information (Creswell, 2014). However, having interviews as the only means for data collection also creates disadvantages, including that information derives from the participants' perspectives and lived experiences rather than information gathered through observation in a natural setting (Creswell, 2014). With the data being from the participants' perspectives, the additional disadvantage is that some participants may not be as articulate in providing their perspectives (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, may influence bias on

the responses by being present in the interview process (Creswell, 2014). Because this phenomenological study sought to understand college counseling programs and the college-going culture in college-preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles from the perspective of college counselors, interviews allowed the researcher to understand the phenomenon from the lived experiences and perspectives of college counselors, to address the research questions of the study.

Setting

This phenomenological study took place in Southern California, specifically in Los Angeles. The study focused on college-preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles that serve underrepresented students as established by the number of low-income students and students who will be the first generation in their family to go to college. Table 2 displays demographic information about the schools represented in the study using data from the 2012–2013 school year as provided by the California Charter Schools Association.

Table 2

Demographic Information for Participants' Schools

School	Total Enrollment	% of Free/Reduced Lunch	% Students with Disabilities
1	453	96%	9%
2	483	99%	11%
3	718	84%	5%
4	432	91%	10%
5	458	98%	6%
6	365	68%	10%

Note. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number. Numbers are based on 2012–2013 data.

Population, Sample and Sampling Procedures

The following passages describe the target population chosen for the study and the criteria and sampling procedures used in order to obtain the most representative sample for this study.

Population. The target population consisted of persons responsible for implementing the day-to-day functions of college counseling programs at 20 college-preparatory charter high schools representing 11 different organizations in Los Angeles.

Sample. All of the participants in this study: (a) have at least one year of experience in their given position at that school, (b) are employed at a school that has had at least three graduating classes as a school and uses A-G course requirements as part of its graduation requirements, (c) are employed at a college-preparatory charter high school in Los Angeles, California, and (d) are the individual at their school site responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the college counseling program at the site. Moreover, the participants in the sample all work at charter schools that define themselves as college-preparatory high schools according to their mission statement and/or name, and require all students to complete A-G course requirements for graduation. A-G course requirements are paramount in the access to postsecondary education in California and set the foundation to college counseling programs (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; McClafferty et al., 2002).

To ensure that the participants met the respective demographics and the aforementioned criteria, the recruitment letter indicated that participants must meet the criteria. Also, the researcher engaged the participants in a brief verbal demographic survey prior to the interview to ensure that they met the criteria (Appendix I).

From a master list provided by the California Charter Schools Association, 26 schools

met the criteria of having had three or more graduating classes and where at least 60% of their students come from underrepresented backgrounds as defined by the reduced/free-lunch percentage. However, given that the focus of this study is college access and high school graduation plays a role in college access, the researcher selected schools with at least a 70% graduation rate. This narrowed the school list to 20, with 11 Charter Management Organizations/Networks and two independent schools. After pursuing Charter Management Organizations (CMO) and individual schools, seven participants representing six schools and CMOs and charter networks were represented in the study. One of the CMOs or charter networks did not approve its schools to participate in the study, thus narrowing the school list to 15 eligible participating school sites. Additionally, two schools, both from two different CMO and Networks did not have potential participants meeting the criteria, thus narrowing potential schools to 13 and eight potential CMOs and charter networks. An additional five of those remaining 13 schools all belong to one CMO, from which one participant belongs to. The remaining six participants represent five of the remaining CMOs or charter networks, thus leaving three CMOs and four schools not represented in the study. The researcher did not hear back from potential participants from the remaining CMOs and schools. Table 3 shows demographic information of the study participants.

Sampling procedures. Participant recruitment was conducted by sending an email to principals of charter schools and administrators overseeing college counseling and community partnerships at the CMOs and charter networks that met the criteria for the study and the program director of a Los Angeles-based college outreach organization that works closely with charter schools (Appendix C). The email included brief information about the study and the

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Participant	Organization	Number of graduating classes	Years of experience as college counselors	Number of college counselors at school site
1	A	8	4	1
2	B	7	2	1
3	C	7	3	1
4	D	5	4	4
5	D	5	2	4
6	E	5	2	3
7	F	5	3	1

participant criteria, requested their participation with sharing the study information with potential participants at their school site(s), and provided researcher contact information and an attachment providing additional study information (Appendices C and E). Moreover, the researcher requested that the administrators provide a letter of support from their school or organization to partake in the study if they agreed to share study information with their college counselors. The email also asked the principals, charter network representatives, and outreach organization director to provide support for the research by sending the study's information to potential participants who could then contact the researcher by phone or via email (Appendix C). The researcher sent two follow-up emails two weeks after the initial email to administrators who had not responded (Appendix D).

Given a limited number of participants after two weeks of reaching out to the schools, organizations, and networks, the researcher also posted a message on Facebook inviting qualified participants to take part in the study (Appendix H). The researcher then re-posted the social media invitation two weeks after the initial post (Appendix H). The researcher also used snowball sampling of individuals, meaning individuals referred by other participants or colleagues, who

met the sample criteria to further find participants to interview (Creswell, 2007). Participants were interviewed by phone or in person based on their respective preference.

Individuals who met the criteria were selected for the semi-structured interview based on the research questions. (Appendix A).

Human Subject Considerations

Permission and access to study participants was acquired through the school principals and CMO and charter network representatives of charter schools meeting the criteria and a Los Angeles-based college outreach organization that works with charter schools. The researcher emailed the school principals and organization representatives and supplied information about the study and the participant criteria and requested that they share the study information with potential participants at their sites. The researcher also supplied contact information and an attachment providing additional study information (Appendices C and E). The researcher asked the administrators to provide a letter of support if they granted permission and access to potential participants. Lastly, the researcher requested that interested potential participants contact her by phone or via email if the school or charter network granted permission for them to participate in the study (Appendix C).

The researcher also used social media for recruitment and asked that participants send a message or email to the researcher if they were interested in participating and met the criteria. Participants were interviewed by phone or in person based on their respective preferences. Snowball sampling was also used to recruit participants. Snowball sampling occurred when participants or colleagues referred other participants to the study.

To protect the participants of the study, the researcher completed the Social and Behavioral Research for Human Subjects Consideration certification training via the

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) as a standard protocol for similar social science research (Appendix J). Participants received an electronic version of the informed consent form prior to the interview (Appendix B). Participants who opted to interview in person received hard copies of the informed consent form and submitted a signed copy to the researcher during the interview meeting time. Participants who opted to participate in a phone interview emailed a scanned copy of their signed consent form to the researcher prior to the study. The informed consent form provided participants with full disclosure about the nature of the study, identified the faculty supervisor overseeing the researcher and study, described data collection methods to be utilized in the study, and reviewed the participants' rights to refuse participation or to withdraw at any point during the study without consequences to the participants. The informed consent invited participants to partake in the research study, which was conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctorate degree in education from the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. Participants were asked to sign the form acknowledging the information had been read and that they were in agreement to their rights as participants.

In an interview, the identity of the participant to the researcher is not anonymous. However, the researcher ensured confidentiality and anonymity of the participants when presenting information by assigning a numeric code to each participant. To ensure participants' identities were protected, all files were coded in numerical order—1, 2, 3, etc.—in the order the participant was interviewed. Each of the interview files was assigned an identification code beginning with Date_1 to ensure participant confidentiality. All interview recordings and written transcripts were saved and encrypted with passwords in the researcher's computer.

The potential risks to study participants were considered minimal and may have included

emotional discomfort, boredom, and fatigue. In the event that participants did experience any negative emotions at any point during the interview, they had the option of a short break. Furthermore, at any point, the participant was able to request for the recording device to be turned off, refuse to answer any question, or to end the interview. Participation was strictly voluntary.

The social benefits of the study were intended to be an increase in understanding the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of college counseling programs in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles and an increase in understanding what charter high school college counselors perceive to be the most important components in a charter high school college-going culture that will assist underrepresented students with access to college and preparation to persist in higher education. The results from the study may provide other charter schools with information that might be utilized to strengthen their college counseling programs and promote greater enrollment rates of their students into higher education institutions. Lastly, results may also support policy-making professionals, school districts, schools, and college access professionals to identify core principles that will support college readiness and matriculation for students from charter high schools, underrepresented backgrounds, and urban communities.

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection tool for this study (Creswell, 2007). The semi-structured interviews were guided by nine questions aimed to address the research questions of the study. The guiding questions for the semi-structured interviews are included in Appendix A and were generated from the literature review as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Relationship between Research Questions, Interview Questions, and Literature

Research questions	Interview questions	Literature sources
RQ1: How do college counselors in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles describe the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of their school's college counseling program?	What is the goal of your position?	Bromberg & Theokas, 2014; Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McClafferty et al., 2002; McKillip et al., n.d.; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2012
	How much of your time is spent on college counseling and non-college counseling responsibilities?	Bromberg & Theokas, 2014; Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McClafferty et al., 2002; McKillip et al., n.d.; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2012
	Tell me about the goals of your program.	Hanselman, 2005; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McClafferty et al., 2002; McDonough, 2004; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2006; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a
	Tell me about the outcomes of your program.	Bromberg & Theokas, 2014; Hanselman, 2005; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; McClafferty et al., 2002; McDonough, 2004; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2006; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2012
RQ2: What do college counselors from college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles perceive as most important in a charter high school college-going culture to help underrepresented students with access to college and preparation to persist in higher education?	What is your level of comfort with providing financial aid information and assistance to students and their families?	Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Engberg & Gilbert, 2012; National Association for College Admissions Counseling, 2000; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Vargas, 2004

(continued)

Research questions	Interview questions	Literature sources
	Tell me what you perceive as most important in a college-going culture.	Aldana, 2013; Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Hanselman, 2005; McClafferty et al., 2002; McDonough, 2004; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2006; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a
	Tell me what you perceive as most important in a college-going culture to help underrepresented students access and persist in higher education.	Bryan et al., 2011; California Charter Schools, 2013a; Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McDonough, 2004; McKillip et al., 2012; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Tedin & Weiher, 2011; Vargas, 2008

Focus of the interview. The focus of the interview was to understand the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of college counseling programs in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles. Furthermore, the interview also explored what college preparatory charter high school college counselors perceive to be the most important components in a charter high school college-going culture in assisting underrepresented students with access to college and preparation to persist in higher education.

Specifics of process. Through a 30-minute, semi-structured interview, the researcher gathered information from the participants to answer the research questions. The researcher had guiding questions for the interview and audio recorded participant responses with participant permission. The researcher then transcribed the participant responses.

Validity. To develop evidence of the content validity of the instrument, an expert panel of educators provided feedback on the semi-structured interview questions (Creswell, 2007). Content validity was also established through an expert review prior to starting the data collection process of the study. The semi-structured survey questions were revised based on the feedback provided from the expert panel and the expert review.

Expert review. To ensure the content validity and the alignment to the study's research questions, three graduate faculty member from the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University and one content expert reviewed the semi-structured interview questions (Creswell, 2007). The content expert is a current professor in the School Counseling program at a local university and teaches the college counseling class for prospective counselors. She also oversees her own college access outreach program in the local area. The expert reviewed the content to ensure its alignment between the semi-structured survey questions and the research questions for the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Participants were identified through emails that the researcher sent to school principals and CMO and charter network representatives from college-preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles and a Los Angeles-based college outreach organization that works with charter schools. The contents of the emails are discussed above.

The researcher also posted messages on Facebook recruiting participants for the study (Appendix H). The researcher reposted the message on Facebook within two weeks of the initial post (Appendix H). Additionally, the researcher used snowball sampling to recruit other participants.

To collect data for the study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews of college counselors who met the study criteria as described above (Appendix A). Interviews were held at a location that was convenient for participants or by phone if desired by the participant (Appendix H). Participants were also given a Skype or Google Hangout option for the interview; however none selected that. Interviews lasted no longer than 30 minutes and occurred in one sitting. The researcher requested permission from the participants to record their responses prior

to beginning the interview, reminded them that their identities will be kept confidential, and provided the informed consent participants had to sign to agree to participate in the study (Appendix B).

The interviews were semi-structured through general guiding questions (Appendix A), and they were recorded and then transcribed for analysis. Per Creswell (2007), the researcher created a guide for jotting down any notes as thoughts came up for the responses.

Data Management

Upon data collection, all audio files were securely stored in the researcher's personal computer. The audio files and the interview transcripts were password protected. Participants' responses were transcribed and coded onto a Word document that was saved in an encrypted format on the researcher's personal computer. The Word document was password protected and encrypted to secure the participants' confidentiality of records. To ensure participants' identity was protected, all files were coded with the date and a numerical order, 1, 2, 3, etc. in the order the participant was interviewed. Study data will be destroyed no sooner than three years and within five years after the completion of the study.

Data Analysis and Reporting

Once data was collected, the researcher transcribed the interview responses and then sent the transcripts to the participants for their review to ensure accuracy prior to analyzing the data (Appendix I). The researcher gave participants six days to review their transcripts and return them with any necessary modifications (Appendix I). If a participant did not respond, the transcript was assumed to need no modifications.

Upon confirming the accuracy of transcripts with participants, the researcher read and took notes on the transcripts. According to Creswell (2007), reading and taking notes on the

transcript will help with identifying codes and themes. Coding involves creating categories to analyze the information (Creswell, 2007). Per Creswell (2007), the researcher allowed themes and categories to emerge to ensure accurate presented of the data collected. The researcher noted all themes per interview question, per participant. Then, the researcher identified overlap between themes across all participant responses per question to synthesize the four to seven themes per question. Moreover, the researcher then developed five to six overarching themes for the codes to be able to report on the data collected. Additionally, the researcher selected the six themes that were most repeated across the responses to highlight in Chapter 5.

Furthermore, the researcher called on two volunteer experienced coders to also analyze the data. Each coded the data independently and then returned it to the researcher. Having experienced coders analyze the data allowed the researcher to compare results and negotiate the final findings of the study. The researcher used coded data received from the volunteer experienced coders to further analyze it.

Once the data was coded and themes were identified, the researcher interpreted the information. Interpreting refers to the researcher drawing on overarching information from the data (Creswell, 2007). The researcher presented the essence of the phenomenon using the themes found in a table format (Creswell, 2007). For the purpose of this study, the researcher also used the indicators of the Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture to analyze overlapping themes that emerged from the data and those selected to be highlighted in Chapter Five (Creswell, 2007; McClafferty et al., 2002).

Positionality

As a practicing college counselor at a California college-preparatory high school and someone who is responsible for developing and implementing the college counseling program,

the researcher made sure to leave her role aside and engage in a one-way conversation with the participants (Creswell, 2007). Given that she is responsible for developing and implementing the college counseling program at her school, the researcher has a general perspective of the design, goals, and outcomes of college counseling programs in charter schools.

Summary

This chapter focused on the proposed methodology for the study to address the research questions. Based on the aforementioned information, the study in its nature was phenomenological and consisted of individual interviews to explore the college counseling program and college-going culture in college-preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles, California.

Chapter Four: Results

This chapter presents the detailed findings of the study and begins with an introduction, which is followed by the presentation of findings for each guiding research question, and then concludes with a summary of the key findings.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was twofold: a) to describe and compare the goals, design, implementation and outcomes of college counseling programs in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles as experienced and shared by high school college counselors and (b) to explore what those counselors perceive to be the most important components in fostering a college-going culture that will help underrepresented students gain access to college and prepare them to persist in higher education.

The study used the following two research questions:

1. How do college counselors in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles describe the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of their school's college counseling program?
2. What do college counselors from college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles perceive as most important in a charter high school college-going culture to help underrepresented students with access to college and preparation to persist in higher education?

This phenomenological study used participant interviews to understand college counseling programs in college-preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles and the important factors in a college-going culture to help underrepresented students access and persist in higher education. The study involved seven college counselors from six college-preparatory charter high schools in the city of Los Angeles. Data was collected during the months of January and February 2015 through interviews with counselors who have been working with the day-to-

day functions of the college counseling program at their schools for at least one academic year.

Findings

The interview responses were analyzed to find themes and subcategories to these themes (Creswell, 2007). A total of seven counselors participated in the interviews; after the interviews, each response was transcribed, coded, and analyzed to identify themes under every interview question. To generate the themes for the study, two coders and the researcher independently coded each interview transcript, noting themes that emerged from the responses. Findings per research and interview question are described in the following paragraphs.

Research question one. The first research question sought to identify the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of the college counseling programs of college-preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles. To address the research topic, the researcher used six interview questions. The following paragraphs highlight the themes found in the participant responses for each of the six questions.

Interview question one. Interview question number one inquired about the purpose of the participants' position as counselors. The four themes that emerged from all responses included supporting students through high school graduation, overseeing college and university acceptance, involving parents, and completing administrative responsibilities. Two participants also reported provided socio-emotional counseling, and one did so when dealing with behavioral issues. Additionally, two participants reported that part of their goal is to ensure students have the resources and skills for success. All seven participants responded that ensuring students' high school graduation is accomplished through ensuring academic success, serving as an academic resource to the student, and ensuring A-G course completion. In addition, overseeing college and university access and acceptance includes connecting students to resources in higher education,

supporting their transition to higher education, college and career readiness, preparing students for college persistence, ensuring A-G course completion for college eligibility, collaborating with colleagues to strengthen college awareness and readiness through curriculum, and providing college counseling overall. Moreover, study participants are responsible for involving parents in the counseling process, and one counselor shared facilitating family and student communication. Ultimately, all seven of the participants reported having administrative responsibilities that included master scheduling, engaging in the hiring process of other staff members, scheduling students, and sitting on committees.

Interview question two. Interview question number two inquired about the participants' time spent on college counseling versus other counseling responsibilities. Five of the seven counselors reported that they spend at least 75% of their time engaging in college counseling. The other two counselors reported that 40% of their time is spent on college-counseling responsibilities. The remainder of the time for all participants is spent on administrative responsibilities, engaging in scheduling students, supervising students throughout breaks, teaching courses, supporting or addressing behavior issues, and facilitating graduation checks to ensure students are on track to graduate. Three of the counselors did report that the percentage of their time spent on college counseling responsibilities depends on the time of the year.

Interview question three. Interview question three asked participants about the goals of their college counseling program. Participants reported the goals of their college counseling programs as falling into the following five major areas: college awareness for all students, parental involvement, higher education access and enrollment, high school graduation, and financial literacy. Participants indicated that the awareness of college options and opportunities was the foundation of their programs. One of the counselors indicated that college exposure

happened through tools such as Naviance, a college and career readiness website paid for by schools. Furthermore, all seven participants reported that they engage parents and families in the high school success and college preparation and enrollment process. Additionally, for all seven participants, higher education access and enrollment consisted of increasing four-year college acceptances, connecting students to postsecondary education options that focus on all forms of higher education, and building student eligibility for higher education. One participant shared that building eligibility for students happens through summer and extracurricular involvement opportunities. Moreover, all seven participants reported that tasks related to increasing access and enrollment included college entrance test preparation for the SAT and ACT, and providing college and financial aid application support. Also, participants reported high school graduation as an overarching goal, which consists of conducting A-G course requirement checks and scheduling students into the appropriate classes. Lastly, one of the participants reported financial literacy as a goal for the college counseling program.

Interview question four. Interview question four inquired about the design of the college counseling program at the respective participants' schools. Four out of the seven participants shared that they are the only college counselors at their respective schools. Of the remaining three, two were one of four counselors, who were divided by grade level and rotating with their grade. The remaining counselor was one of three counselors; the participant's school has one counselor for grade 9 and 10 and two counselors for grades 11 and 12; the participant is an 11th- and 12th-grade counselor.

Furthermore, participants spoke to main components of their job design, which consists of: providing one-on-one counseling, college advisory classes, A-G course requirements information, college access information, teacher involvement, and college awareness in middle

school. All seven participants reported engaging in one-on-one counseling to deliver more student-specific information such as personalized academic success information or college information. For one of the participants, this personalized support included focusing on struggling students. The college advisory classes served as another way of providing college counseling for five of the schools, however on a larger scale. Depending on the school, college advisory classes are taught by elective teachers hired specifically for the class, the counselor, or the art teacher. For all of the schools, A-G course requirements were at the foundation of their programs both for the purpose of high school graduation and college access. Providing college access information was also a key component for all seven participants. College access information includes handling details on college entrance examinations, providing college and financial aid application support, and creating overall school-wide awareness about college options. One of the schools has developed a mentoring program to be able to provide college access information to its students. The participant shared that students are divided into smaller groups and assigned to an external mentor who is a professional in the community and meets with students four times per academic year to talk about their college plans and academic progress. Lastly, one of the participants shared that teacher involvement in the college counseling program and starting college conversations in middle school when possible was an important component of their design.

Interview question five. Interview question number five asked participants to share about the implementation of their college counseling program. The implementation of college counseling programs includes individual counseling, A-G course requirements, college advisory classes, college access, and academic advising and success. All participants shared that they engage in one-on-one counseling at least once a year with their students based on their low

student-to-counselor ratio. Moreover, all participants' schools use A-G requirements as one of the requirements for graduation. College advisory classes for five of the schools serve as a method for providing college preparation through delivering college information, helping students develop grit, and having them complete parts of their college and financial aid applications. Two of the schools also involve peer counselors, who are students selected to be class leaders in the college advisory classes, to present college information and support with the college application and preparation classes. Furthermore, all participants shared college access as an integral part of their college counseling program. College access happens through class presentations, external mentors who visit the school, and college visits. Finally, academic advising and success encompasses academic counseling, the afterschool tutoring that counselors oversee for students at two of the schools, plans for struggling students, graduation checks at all schools and Student Success Team meetings at one of the schools.

Interview question six. Interview question number six asked participants to share the outcomes of their college counseling program. Participant responses have been organized into the following categories: college acceptance rates, increased student success, college access information, and A-G course completion rates. The participants reported college acceptance rates ranging from 45% to 92% with all having close to 100% of four-year college acceptances as an aspiring goal. Additionally, all seven participants indicated increased student success as one of the outcomes, including increase in students' academic grade point averages, improving their academic skills, and for two also the student tutoring outcomes. A shared outcome between all of the participants' campuses was providing college access information for all students. College access information to students consisted of engaging students and parents on Naviance college searches, opening options to undocumented students through scholarship opportunities, and

increasing student involvement through awareness of summer and extracurricular opportunities. Lastly, participants shared that they have achieved and continue to achieve 100% A-G course completion for all students.

Summary. From the analysis of the interview transcripts, the researcher identified four to five themes for each of the four components of the study's first research question as shown in Table 5. The first column delineates the purpose of the college counselor role at the school sites represented by the participants per the design of their college counseling program. The second to fifth columns highlights the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of the college counseling programs represented in this study.

Research question two. The second research question sought to understand the important factors in a college-going culture to help underrepresented students access and persist in higher education from the perspective of college counselors. To address the research question, the researcher used three interview questions to highlight factors that college counselors identified as important. Themes from participant responses to each of the three questions are discussed below.

Interview question seven. Interview question number seven inquired about participants' level of comfort with providing college financial aid information and assistance to students and families. Participants reported that they feel very comfortable with providing college financial aid information and support to students and their families. Additionally, two of the participants reported an increase in their level of comfort through professional development opportunities, and they continue to educate themselves. Six of the participants indicated that they conduct one-on-one meetings with students and families to discuss financial aid options given that they know understand financial aid awareness impacts students' options for higher education.

Table 5

Goals, Design, Implementation, and Outcomes of College Counseling Programs

Purpose of participants' roles	Goals	Design	Implementation	Outcomes
High school graduation	High school graduation	A-G course requirements	Academic advising, success	Increased student success
College and university acceptance	Higher education access and enrollment	College advisory classes	A-G course requirements	A-G course completion rates
Parental involvement	College awareness for all students	Providing college access information	College advisory classes	College acceptance rates
Administrative responsibilities	Parental involvement	Small student-to-counselor ratio	College access	College access information
Socio-emotional counseling	Financial literacy	One-on-one counseling	Individual counseling	
Resources and skills for success		Teacher involvement College awareness in middle school		

Interview question eight. Interview question number eight requested that participants share their perceptions about what is most important in a college-going culture. Participants' responses fell into the following categories: college awareness, student motivation, parental involvement, holistic support, and study skills support. All participants expressed that having awareness about college and access to resources and information is at the foundation of a college-going culture. One participant shared, "The smallest little details whether it is ACT versus SAT, and 'why would it benefit me,' those are little things that they are not aware of, so that really makes a big difference for them."

Moreover, per the responses of three of the participants, student motivation and willingness to meet and exceed expectations also impact the college-going culture. Helping build student motivation, as one participant shared, comes from students being exposed to other

students who look like them and are in higher education. The participant said,

Also expose students to other people who look like them, who come from similar communities or backgrounds, to let them know that people who look like you and come before you have done it. I think that connection for students is really important because they have an opportunity to ask real-life questions and to be able to connect with them on a more personal level; this works in many students' benefit in terms of just giving them that courage and that sense of empowerment that it is a reality for them.

Likewise, all seven participants reported that parental involvement influences the college-going culture because this creates another layer of accountability and support for the student. As one of the participants said,

I think it is great when we have our parents come in and the students that have that parental support, or even if the parent may not know exactly what we are talking about when it comes to financial aid and college terms, but if they know that they want their student to go to college they tend to make their student be accountable for themselves.

Also, four of the participants indicated that holistic support is integral in creating a college-going culture. Students must feel that they have support from all staff members, and that it is continuous and sustained. One participant shared,

I would definitely say a support system. I think that just knowing about it and hearing that "these people are here to help me with college stuff," but knowing that there is follow through; that "I am seeing my peers get help and they are doing good things with this and they are getting the support they need and it is continued and sustained."

Lastly, one of the participants responded that providing study skills support such as note-taking and test-taking skills as part of the college-going culture is also important.

Interview question nine. Interview question number nine asked participants to share their perceptions about what is most important in a college-going culture as it pertains to helping underrepresented students both access and persist in higher education. For the purpose of access, responses fell into the following categories: college awareness, parental involvement, student motivation, support, Advanced Placement (AP) and honors courses, extracurricular involvement, and test preparation resources. Meanwhile, for persistence, the responses were divided as follows: parental involvement, support, academic rigor, alumni involvement, and social preparation.

Based on participants' perceptions, a college-going culture should include college awareness, parental involvement, student motivation, support, AP and honors courses, extracurricular involvement, and test preparation resources to help underrepresented students access higher education. College awareness, as described by all seven participants, includes checklists on the college process, and other school-wide systems of delivering college information. Additionally, three of the participants shared that parental involvement in the college process is essential given that underrepresented students have parents who may also be unaware of the college preparation process and thus involving them in the process helps bridge that gap for students and families. Moreover, as expressed by three participants, student motivation to succeed influences their access and options for higher education. As one of the counselors shared,

The willingness of students to go above and beyond what is instructed of them rather than settle for the bare minimum . . . I think that with our charter school you have two groups: the students that go above and beyond what is instructed that you can tell that their transcripts are going to be near perfect and are not going to struggle getting into a college

(they will make it) and there are those that are like “I am doing the bare minimum, I am not taking any AP classes, or any honor classes, I am good with just a 2.0 because I just want to play sports, I am good with Cs” and that is how they graduate, but when they graduate, they realize how limited their options are and wish they could do it over again.

Also, support from all staff is crucial in developing student motivation and providing them the resources needed to access higher education. Furthermore, two counselors shared that AP and honors courses also help increase student motivation and readiness to access higher education. Lastly, one participant shared that extracurricular involvement and test preparation resources help students build their competitiveness to access higher education.

Participants’ responses to the important factors in a college-going culture that help underrepresented students persist in higher education fall under the following themes: parental involvement, support, academic rigor, alumni involvement, social preparation, and building student independence. Two of the participants shared that parental involvement is still important in helping students persist in higher education. Furthermore, three participants said continuous and sustained support in higher education is important as underrepresented students transition and adapt to higher education. One of the participants responded,

We have a small school so that really helps; it helps that all of the teachers know their students by name and all of the counselors, we know all of our students by name, we know their families, we have that connection with them. It is the same as “it takes a village to raise a child” that is what it is when it comes to our school; I think it is necessary when it comes to first-generation, low-income students so they can become successful.

One counselor shared the importance of helping students understand their social capital

as part of their support system, whether this is another student or a professional at the university with whom the student has interacted prior to college. Additionally, the counselor shared,

For persistence, allowing students to utilize opportunities when college representatives come to their school or they come in contact with them, how to use that social capital, especially if that is a school that they end up attending to in the fall, they have a direct go-to person—whether that person is in admissions, RA in the dorms, it is someone who is already familiar with the system, I think having that contact person, that safety net per se, is always important to have someone checking on them.

According to three of the counselors, academic rigor also impacts student persistence. Students require academic rigor in high school to better transition to the demands of higher education. A participant expressed, “For persistence, I would say academic preparation is important for the rigor of college and getting into higher level college classes. We are trying to provide rigor through the AP classes.” Additionally, four counselors reported that involving alumni and having them share stories about their experience with students would help with persistence. It is also important to involve alumni in sharing with school staff about their experiences transitioning and adapting to college because of the learning that can happen regarding how to best prepare students for higher education. Also, three participants shared that social preparation also impacts student persistence; thus college visits and engaging in activities that help students build the skills to adapt to new environments and to interact with individuals from other backgrounds. One of the participants responded, “they can be the smartest child/kid, but if they do not know how to navigate or have that support from the family or a friend, it is very hard for them to continue on in college.” Additionally, another participant shared,

I think it is those two pieces, one getting them the experiences with people from other

cultures, with other settings that let them feel comfortable and not completely intimidated when they get to school and have a roommate that is from a culture that they don't know anything about.

Ultimately, two participants shared that building student independence helps them persist in higher education.

Summary. After analyzing the interview transcripts, the researcher identified four to seven themes for each of the three components of the study's second research question as shown in Table 6. The first column shows themes from participant responses to question eight, indicating the most important factors in a college-going culture overall. The second column displays the themes from the first part of question nine about the most important factors in a college-going culture to help underrepresented students access higher education. Furthermore, it includes financial aid information as one of the themes per the responses to question seven. Finally, the third column provides the themes found in the second part of question nine regarding the most important factors in a college-going culture to help underrepresented students persist in higher education.

Summary of Key Findings

The participant responses yielded a total of 29 themes across the two research questions. The first research question consisted of 16 themes, and the second research question included 13 themes. The key themes to research question number one were high school graduation, college

Table 6

Important Factors in a College-Going Culture

College-going culture	Access for underrepresented students	Persistence for underrepresented students
College awareness	College awareness	Parental involvement
Parental involvement	Parental involvement	Support
Student motivation	Student motivation	Academic rigor
Holistic support	Support	Alumni involvement
Study skills support	Financial aid information	Building student independence
	Extracurricular involvement	
	Test preparation resources	

acceptances, parental involvement, administrative responsibilities, socio-emotional counseling, resources and skills for success, college awareness, financial literacy, A-G course requirements, college advisory classes, small student-to-counselor ratio, one-one-one counseling, academic advising and success, and A-G course completion. Meanwhile, the key themes for the second research question were college awareness, parental involvement, student motivation, support, AP and honors classes, financial aid information, academic rigor, alumni involvement, social preparation, and building student independence.

The themes in the first research question synthesize the components of college counseling programs in college-preparatory charter high schools and their alignment to the goals and outcomes of the program, and the purpose and goals of the college counselor position. Given that high school success determines the ability to access higher education, participants shared that high school graduation, academic success, and A-G course requirements and their completion were fundamental to prepare students to access higher education. The second tier to the college counseling programs includes college awareness and parental involvement, and for some schools it also included college advisory classes, to yield college acceptances. Finally, the one-on-one counseling and small student-to-counselor ratios at the schools allowed the students to receive

socio-emotional counseling when needed and have counselors and parents collaborate to meet the goals of the college counseling program.

Additionally, the themes to the second research question supplement those of the first research question as they depict the perceptions of the college counselors regarding important factors in a college-going culture. Per the participants' perceptions, AP and honors classes, academic rigor, and student motivation are important factors in preparing students for the academic demands of higher education. Furthermore, college awareness, parental involvement, financial aid information, alumni involvement, social preparation, extracurricular involvement, test preparation resources, and building student independence in a college-going culture will help students with both access to and persistence in higher education.

Overall, 29 themes were reported in the participant interviews. From those 29, five are the most reported and most encompassing of the other themes. The five key themes are college awareness, parental involvement, academic advising and success, small student-to-counselor ratio, and social preparation. These five key themes will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter presents an analysis of the key findings for the study, followed by conclusions, implications for policy, practices, and further study; and it concludes with a summary of the study.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was twofold: (a) to describe and compare the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of college counseling programs in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles as experienced and shared by high school college counselors and (b) to explore what those counselors perceive to be the most important components in fostering a college-going culture that will help underrepresented students gain access to college and prepare them to persist in higher education.

The study used the following two research questions:

1. How do college counselors in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles describe the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of their school's college counseling program?

2. What do college counselors from college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles perceive as most important in a charter high school college-going culture to help underrepresented students with access to college and preparation to persist in higher education?

This phenomenological study was informed by seven participant interviews. The participants for the study were all college counselors who have been responsible for the day-to-day functions of the college counseling program at their schools for at least one academic year. The participants represent six college-preparatory charter high schools and CMOs in the city of Los Angeles that have had at least three graduating classes. The data for the study was collected during the months of January and February 2015 through 30-minute interviews.

Interpretation of Key Findings

The participants for this study all work for college-preparatory charter high schools under CMOs and networks, all which share similar values about student success and four-year higher education enrollment after high school. Thus, both their organization and school influence their college counseling programs. Five key themes emerged from an analysis of the interview data: college awareness, parental involvement, academic advising and success, small student-to-counselor ratio, and social preparation.

College awareness. Participants described college awareness as the key component when working with underrepresented students and their families, as the conversation about college is often something new for them. As Bryan et al. (2011), Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008), and Savitz-Romer (2012a) discuss, students from underrepresented backgrounds rely on their schools to inform them about the preparation and pathway to higher education. Similarly, one of the participants shared, “The goal of our program is to expand the horizons and post-secondary educational opportunities to our underrepresented students.” Thus, in order to access higher education, students and their families must first be aware of the opportunities available and how to attain them. Students from underrepresented backgrounds are more likely to attend schools that have large counselor-to-student ratios and hence provide less academic guidance and support (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Vargas, 2004). The charter high schools and organizations represented in this study are working to address these college awareness gaps and ensure that their students know their options and parents are also part of the conversation. As one of the participants responded,

My individual goal is to inform our students and make sure that they have all of the resources available to them. Previously, our focus was on four-year universities, and now

we are moving away from that culture and being more open to promote career technical routes. We are adding more career and community college support because we are trying to shift the culture and hence the design is also shifting.

Pursuing higher education includes all pathways after high school as long as they align to the students' needs and interests. Community college continues to be one form of access to higher education and an option for students interested in career-technical education and those interested in transferring to a university (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). In the process of college awareness, as another participant shared, it is important

to not exclude anyone in the process, to encourage students to be aware and to really believe that college is an option for them and that college looks different for everyone, while there are some students on a community college track, vocational, four-year, regardless of the track, it is college and it is attainable.

While the goal is to increase the number of students completing bachelor's degrees, it is important for students to understand their options both in terms of pathways and ultimate higher education graduation goals (Executive Office, 2014; Pell Institute, 2011). Higher education is not limited to four-year universities directly after high school. President Obama (Hudson, 2015) recently proposed to make community college free for the first two years for students seeking to attend at least half-time and who make progress toward degree or program completion. The need for an educated workforce and to address the workforce gap has also led to the bolstering of the community college system, especially in California. In California, Governor Brown signed the Student Success Act of 2012 to bolster the community college system and ensure that it continues to be a viable pathway for students (California Community Colleges, 2012; Koseff, 2014). Most recently, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (2015) issued a

press release with the official notice that 15 community colleges received initial approval to develop and pilot bachelor's degrees. Hence, community colleges in the state of California, including some local to Los Angeles, will now provide an additional higher education option to students (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2015). Per the participant responses and the literature, providing options and creating awareness of them will strengthen the college counseling programs at the high schools (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Perna et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Vargas, 2004).

College awareness includes financial aid information for parents, and participants shared that they often discuss this information in large groups and one-on-one to ensure that finances are not a barrier in the process. Savitz-Romer (2012a) and Vargas (2004) highlight that families and students from underrepresented backgrounds may not be as informed about the need-based financial aid available to help students pursue higher education, and say it is the awareness and conversations with knowledgeable individuals that further increase the likelihood of underrepresented students accessing higher education (Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Vargas, 2004). An interview participant commented,

starting at around March when they start releasing the financial aid awards, students are all on one-on-one appointments with the parents; we meet with them, look over the financial aid awards and help them make decisions. I feel that I have enough knowledge to make pretty informed decisions or help them make decisions to the best universities. I work on trying to abstain from taking out any types of loans, but I do very well know all of the financial aid programs.

Creating awareness at the schools and organizations represented in this study is done through classroom presentations, college advisory classes, programs like Naviance, one-on-one

meetings with students and/or parents, small-group meetings, and visits by college representatives to the high school campuses. Similarly, Hanselman (2005), Farmer-Hinton & McCullough (2008), and Farmer-Hinton (2010), note that college counseling programs should offer awareness and counseling options through various means such as large-group presentations, small-group counseling, one-one-one counseling, and parent-and-student counseling. Additionally, Corwin and Tierney (2007) explain that incorporating a college knowledge-building class helps facilitate college awareness. Likewise, at five of the six charter high schools and organizations represented in this study, college advisory classes were a main source for providing college awareness. As a participant shared, college awareness is about not excluding anyone from the process, and for the majority of these schools, the college advisory classes helped ensure that all students are receiving the information.

Parental involvement. Because families may have a limited awareness of the issues surrounding college, participant responses emphasized the importance of parental involvement in college counseling programs. Savitz-Romer (2012a) and Corwin and Tierney (2007) also share that parental involvement, in particular for underrepresented students, helps the student because both the parents and student may lack knowledge about the college preparation and enrollment process. As a participant shared,

I think that when you put together all three, school's involvement, and the student and the parent involvement, then we really get some good outcomes, and I think that is probably the most important, getting parents involved in the college-going process to whatever extent we can get them involved whether it is just having the student research or getting them down here for a discussion about financial aid options for them, I think that is the piece that in my opinion is important.

Additionally, parental involvement is also important to help hold students accountable and help them receive the support needed to thrive academically. Bryan et al. (2011) and Kimura et al. (2008) echo similar reasons for parental involvement being important in collaboration with the counselor and school: it leads students to feel more motivated to pursue college. Moreover, a participant responded,

I think it is great when we have our parents come in and the students that have that parental support, or even if the parent may not know exactly what we are talking about when it comes to financial aid and college terms, but if they know that they want their student to go to college they tend to make their student be accountable for themselves.

Parental involvement per the participant responses and the literature is crucial for both ensuring student academic success and helping students pursue higher education (Bryan et al., 2011; Kimura et al., 2008; McDonough, 2004; Tedin and Wieher, 2011). Finally, Corwin and Tierney (2007) also note that isolated forms of college counseling are not as effective, hence making it important for parents, families, and the school to collaborate to support the student.

Academic advising and success. Given that students need to excel academically in order to graduate high school and then enroll in higher education, interview participants shared that the academic advising students receive from their college counselors and parents is pertinent to the overall college counseling program. Famer-Hinton and McCullough (2008) explain that underrepresented students often attend schools that provide limited academic guidance and support. Savitz-Romer (2012a) and Vargas (2004) also share that both students and families may lack an understanding of classes that need to be taken in order to increase college readiness and success. Participants in this study shared that they provide academic advising to ensure academic success; some collaborate with both teachers and parents to increase student achievement. As a

participant responded,

Individual counseling, I go through all students and have meetings individually with them to let them know that I am here to help them academically or in other aspects, so I also give them the individual time throughout the course of the year as our goal is to meet with them four times a year, so it comes out to one time each quarter.

Similarly, the other participants expressed that they host one-on-one meetings with students and often the families to ensure that the students have all of the support needed to thrive. MacDonald and Dorr (2006) also stress that counselors are not alone in the charge to provide academic advising and college preparation information as teachers should be a part of the process.

Small student-to-counselor ratio. The quality and opportunity for all of these pieces of a college counseling program depends on the student-to-counselor ratio (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McKillip et al., n.d.; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). Charter high schools, specifically those represented by the participants in this study, all have small student-to-counselor ratios compared to their traditional public school counterparts and the averages for the state of California. A participant shared,

With us, we are a school of about 600 students, 600+, and with each counselor being grade-based, you are looking at each counselor having between 100–120 students, which throughout the year with their four years here, you definitely build a relationship that they feel comfortable with and know that you are here in regards to academics or other needs that they may have.

The small student-to-counselor ratio allows for students to receive more comprehensive counseling and build the relationships that will help students feel supported at their schools

(Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McClafferty et al., 2002; Perna et al., 2008). Additionally, students need individualized academic and college counseling that is only feasible with smaller student-to-counselor ratios. Another respondent shared,

We have a small school so that really helps; it helps that all of the teachers know their students by name and all of the counselors, we know all of our students by name, we know their families, we have that connection with them.

The small student-to-counselor ratios create opportunities for school staff to better know the students and their families and hence better serve the students and their needs.

Social preparation. The participants shared that social preparation in the college-going culture is a key factor for college persistence. Social preparation includes helping students adapt to cultures and backgrounds different to theirs, understand how to navigate the resources and support provided to them, and overall socially integrate into their campuses. As one of the participants shared, “they can be the smartest child/kid, but if they do not know how to navigate or have that support from the family or a friend, it is very hard for them to continue on in college.” Parallel to the participant responses, Strayhorn (2010) shares that social integration is pertinent to help students transition to higher education. Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008), Farmer-Hinton (2010), and Savitz-Romer (2012a) speak to teaching students to become self-sufficient, including helping them learn how to navigate their fears and understand how to find resources that can support them. Martinez and Klopott (2005) also share that having students experience academic rigor in high school boosts their chances to adapt and persist in higher education.

Another participant shared,

I think it is those two pieces: one. getting them the experiences with people from other

cultures, with other settings that let them feel comfortable and not completely intimidated when they get to school and have a roommate that is from a culture that they don't know anything about or whatever. But I also think that there is a lot we can do in terms of not just access to AP classes, but teaching the AP classes and reflecting on the data the same way we reflect on CST data and working with alumni to figure out the areas of need and the areas of strength that they had when they went and what built those; I don't think that is something that we track very well.

Part of the social preparation for students is also about showing them how to build and use their social capital. A participant responded,

For persistence, allowing students to utilize opportunities when college representatives come to their school or they come in contact with them, how to use that social capital, especially if that is a school that they end up attending to in the fall, they have a direct go-to person—whether that person is in admissions, RA in the dorms, it is someone who is already familiar with the system, I think having that contact person, that safety net per se, is always important to have someone checking on them.

Parallel to the response, MacDonald and Dorr (2006) discuss that schools need to build partnerships to supplement the services that the school offers and help students learn about additional opportunities available to them.

Connection to theoretical framework. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory consists of five systems that impact the individual: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. From the themes, the microsystem refers to the support the student receives from the school and the family. Parental involvement was one of the themes, along with student-to-counselor ratio to provide the student with the support needed. The

mesosystem refers to the interactions between two or more components of the microsystem.

From the themes of this study, the interaction between the parents and families, and the schools is important to help students access and persist in higher education. Furthermore, the exosystem refers to the indirect impact of the relationship between settings that influence the individual.

The themes of parental involvement, college awareness, and student-to-counselor ratio all fall under the exosystem. The level of parental involvement may be impacted by parents' work schedules, commitments with younger children, or other competing priorities that affect the level of support that students may receive in the household. Similarly, college awareness and whether it is emphasized in the household may be impacted by parents' competing priorities.

Additionally, the student-to-counselor ratio affects the depth of the conversations and level of support that students may or may not receive to help them understand how to make use of the information they have learned about college. The issues of student-to-counselor ratio, parental involvement, college awareness, social preparation, and academic success are all impacted by policies at the national, state, charter organization and school level, per the macrosystem. The chronosystem refers to the depth of each system and depicts the changes that happen with time within the environment or context of the individual. Ultimately, as changes come with time, all systems are impacted, and hence impact the themes shared that help underrepresented students access and persist in higher education.

Connection to conceptual framework. The Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture provide a framework that encompasses nine principles and their respective indicators to establish a college-going culture (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; McClafferty et al., 2002). The nine principles are:

1. College talk

2. Clear expectations
3. Information and resources
4. Comprehensive counseling model
5. Testing and curriculum
6. Faculty involvement
7. Family involvement
8. College partnerships
9. Articulation.

College talk refers to ongoing communication about college. The communication can be verbal, written, or illustrated. The principle of *clear expectations* suggests that all stakeholders have clarity on their responsibility to help the students prepare for higher education.

Furthermore, *information and resources* indicates that students should have access to the information and resources needed to prepare and enroll in higher education. The fourth principle, *comprehensive counseling model* states that all individuals at the school should assume the role of college counselors by engaging in conversations with students about their plans for higher education. Moreover, the fifth principle, *testing and curriculum* suggests that a college-going culture offers college-preparation and college entrance exams for all students. The sixth principle, *faculty involvement* indicates that all school staff should be involved in the college process. Similarly, the seventh principle, *family involvement*, indicates that the family must also be engaged in the college preparation process. Additionally, the eighth principle, *college partnerships*, highlights the importance of schools not acting alone in the college preparation process but collaborating with local college, universities, and community organizations. Finally, the ninth principle, *articulation*, refers to the collaboration between all K-12 feeder schools to

ensure alignment around preparing students for college.

Table 7 indicates the themes from the data and the alignment, if any, to specific principles of the Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture. The themes closely aligned to the Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture with the exception of two principles, *Clear Expectations* and *Articulation*. In the high schools represented in the study, the expectation is that all students will have options after high school, and the level of parental involvement allows them to establish clear expectations. Given that *clear expectations* are part of the established culture of the schools and that the schools are mission-driven, it may be that the expectations come with the mission statements as college-preparatory schools. Additionally, charter high schools do not have direct feeder schools as many accept students using a lottery system and therefore articulation with middle schools may not exist. One participant did share college awareness articulation; however, it is not an indicator of the *articulation* principle.

Table 7

Comparison of Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture to themes from Study

Principle	Themes described by participants
College talk	College awareness; academic advising and success; small student-to-counselor ratio
Clear expectations	Not applicable
Information and resources	College awareness and small student-to-counselor ratio
Comprehensive counseling model	College awareness; parental involvement; academic advising and success; small student-to-counselor ratio
Testing and curriculum	Academic advising and success
Faculty involvement	Academic advising and success
Family involvement	Parental involvement
College partnerships	Not applicable
Articulation	Academic advising and success

Conclusions

The findings of this study yielded support for the following five conclusions pertaining to the research questions, which were drawn from interview responses and literature that substantiate the findings.

College awareness. Students and parents from underrepresented backgrounds rely on schools to inform them about college and options for after high school. When working with students from underrepresented backgrounds, college awareness is needed for both students and their parents as they often lack the knowledge or understanding of how to prepare for and access higher education (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). All seven participants interviewed for this study shared that college awareness was foundational for their college counseling programs. The implementation of college awareness varied from campus to campus; however the purpose was to raise the most possible awareness for students and families about higher education. College awareness extends beyond four-year university options into ensuring students and their families understand all pathways and opportunities. The implementation of college awareness is accomplished through, but not limited to, college advisory classes, one-on-one meetings, large-group presentations, financial aid meetings, and college representatives on campus (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Hanselman, 2005). Overall, schools provide the social capital for underrepresented students and their families to pursue higher education (Bryan et al., 2011; California Charter Schools, 2013c; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008).

Parental involvement. Parental involvement is important to help hold students academically accountable and to help them pursue higher education. Parental involvement is important regardless of the student population; however, it is increasingly important for students

from underrepresented backgrounds because they often lack knowledge about preparing for higher education (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). Moreover, Bryan et al. (2011), Kimura et al. (2009) and the seven participants in the study expressed that collaboration between the families and the schools helps students increase their motivation and feelings of accountability to their education. Hence, parental involvement helps schools meet two of their goals: work toward 100% graduation rates and increase student enrollment in higher education after high school.

Individual academic advising. Students require some form of individualized academic advising in order to succeed academically. The individual academic advising helps students understand the required preparation to graduate high school and to pursue higher education (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008, Savitz-Romer, 2012a; Vargas, 2004). As participants shared, individual academic advising helps students see and feel that there is follow through on providing support when needed. Engberg and Gilbert (2012) also shared that students need several hours of academic counseling in order to pursue their college goals.

Student-to-counselor ratios. Personalized academic and college counseling is critical to the quality of college counseling in high schools, and charter schools perhaps have a greater opportunity than traditional schools to ensure smaller student-to-counselor ratios. In traditional public high schools, especially in underrepresented communities, many of the counselors have large student-to-counselor ratios along with competing priorities that prevent them from providing personalized support to the students (Corwin et al., 2004; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Koven, 2009; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2012; Tierney et al., n.d.;). At the charter schools, five of the participants shared that the small size of their schools allows them to build relationships with their students and the families. Moreover, the counselors are able to

provide the personalized support that their students need (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Finally, the smaller student-to-counselor ratio enables more collaboration between the counselors and the families to be able to host one-on-one meetings that address parent concerns about high school graduation and college access.

Social preparation. College access and persistence depend on students' ability to adapt and navigate changes in their academic rigor, social environment, and academic community. College persistence begins before college; it begins while students prepare for higher education during their high school years through exposure to other cultures, environments, and academic rigor (Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Strayhorn, 2010). Social preparation to transition effectively to higher education is impacted by students' ability to be self-sufficient (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Savitz-Romer, 2012a). As shared by the participants and substantiated by College Board (2009) and Strayhorn (2010) social integration plays a role in student persistence. Additionally, social preparation relies on students' early exposure to individuals and communities different to them, and/or helping them build the social capital that will help them adjust (Strayhorn, 2010). Lastly, Roderick et al. (2011) speak to the importance of helping students find the best college match that will meet their academic and social needs to help them achieve college graduation.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

This study was designed to describe and compare the goals, design, implementation, and outcomes of college counseling programs in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles as experienced and shared by high school college counselors. It was also intended to explore what those counselors perceive to be the most important components in fostering a college-going culture that will help underrepresented students gain access to college and prepare them to persist in higher education. The findings for this study can be used to inform the goals,

design, implementation, and outcomes of college counseling programs in similar schools and charter management organizations. Additionally, findings for the study can also be used to inform policy and practice of college-going cultures in schools that work with underrepresented students to help them prepare to access and persist in higher education. The following four recommendations were derived from the study.

Recommendation one. It is recommended that states, districts, and schools continue to focus on decreasing student-to-counselor ratios to enable the personalized college counseling that students need. Charter schools are experiencing successes because of the relationships that they are able to build with their students and families and the holistic support they are able to provide as a result of being small schools (California Charter Schools, 2013a, 2014).

McClafferty et al. (2002) and Savitz-Romer (2012a) echo the participant responses in noting that college counseling requires comprehensive support from counselors that may best be possible through smaller student-to-counselor ratios.

Recommendation two. It is recommended that counselors have conversations with students about college in collaboration with parents. Given that parents are often relying on the schools to inform them about college preparation and access, conversations about college would be more effective if the parent is part of the conversations (Bryan et al., 2011; Kimura et al., 2008; Tedin and Weiher, 2011). Additionally, participants shared that parental involvement helps hold students accountable because this bridges the home and the school academic expectations. Corwin and Tierney (2007) and Savitz-Romer (2012a) parallel participant responses about the importance of parental involvement to help hold students accountable to increase student success and college preparation.

Recommendation three. It is recommended that college counseling programs should incorporate opportunities for students to be exposed to individuals from different backgrounds and to different environments. Students may struggle to navigate individuals from different backgrounds or adapt to new environments; thus, it is recommended that they be exposed during high school to both cultural diversity and a variety of environments. Strayhorn (2010) shares that social integration is important to success in higher education. Per the participants' responses, social integration for their students includes the ability to interact with individuals from other backgrounds and adjust to environments that are new to them, as college campuses often are for underrepresented students.

Recommendation four. It is recommended that students be challenged academically in high school to help them persist through the increased rigor of college coursework. Transition to and persistence in higher education rely on students' academic preparation (Farmer-Hinton, 2010). Exposure to dual enrollment, honors, and AP courses prepare students for the rigor of higher education (McClafferty et al., 2002). Hence, all students would benefit from such opportunities to prepare for the demands of their college coursework and more effectively adapt to higher education (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006). Connecting students to programs such as Summer Bridge that provide robust academic and social support will further supplement the students' academic preparation (Strayhorn, 2010). Additionally, the Campaign for College Opportunity (2005), Perna et al. (2008), and Savitz-Romer (2012a) discuss the importance of academic articulation between all systems of education to ensure that students are prepared for the academic rigor of college.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research study is one of the first opportunities to further understand the college

counseling programs and efforts at charter high schools in Los Angeles. The recommendations emerged from the sample, methodology, findings, and interpretations of the findings for this study.

Sample of the study. Given that charter schools are still relatively new in education, finding participants who meet criteria solely in the city of Los Angeles was challenging. The researcher recommends both expanding the sample outside of Los Angeles and also allowing previous college counselors at college-preparatory charter high schools to participate in the study. It is also suggested to consider interviewing participants from independent charter schools to draw comparisons to schools under CMOs and charter networks.

Methodology of the study. The researcher recommends conducting a pilot interview prior to collecting participant data. The data acquired was significant; however the researcher learned that the interview was shorter than expected and more information could have been gathered to further inform the research questions. Additionally, the researcher recommends adding questions that inquire about the participants' qualifications and prior experience in their positions to further understand the context of their perceptions.

Study of charter high school alumni. Four of the seven participants mentioned their alumni as being crucial in both supporting and empowering current students as they prepare for higher education and also in assessing the areas of strength and growth of the schools. Three talked about the fact that the charter high schools have had success in getting students into campuses of higher education, but has found sustaining them there has been more challenging. It would further add to the understanding of important components in college-preparatory charter high schools' college-going culture to inquire about alumni perceptions and experiences as they transitioned to higher education.

Future studies. The researcher recommends a mixed-methods approach to acquire perspective from more counselors. Based on the information participants shared, college counseling happens on a year-round basis; thus, time is a challenge. Collecting data via a survey and then giving the option for participants to be interviewed may help prompt more participants to engage in sharing the work they are doing at their respective schools without feeling that they would be forced to use their scarce and valuable time in an interview.

Summary

The study provided and analyzed responses from seven college counselors representing six different schools and charter organizations. With the increased focus on access to higher education, specifically for students from underrepresented communities, the opportunity to learn from different college counseling models is of critical importance. The focus on charter high schools stemmed from their success as alternative forms of public education and their success with high school graduation and college access rates. Additionally, the focus on Los Angeles was due to the influx of college-preparatory charter high school in Los Angeles, all working toward a parallel mission of increasing the number of underrepresented students graduating high school and pursuing higher education (California Charter Schools, 2014; Koven, 2009). Given that charter high schools are still new in the history of education in the United States and that limited literature exists about their college counseling programs, the purpose of this study was to learn from charter school college counselors about their programs and their perceptions about creating a college-going culture that supports underrepresented students access and persist in higher education.

The findings from the study confirm the themes represented in the literature about college access and persistence for underrepresented students and the importance of college awareness in

college counseling programs, especially when working with underrepresented students. Moreover, the study reinforced the idea that parental involvement is critical when helping underrepresented students access higher education because it informs parents who may lack the awareness about college preparation and also helps hold students more accountable for their academic success. The study also confirmed that academic advising that is personalized increases student success and motivation to pursue higher education. Additionally, it was established that counselor-to-student ratios impact the quality of college counseling students receive and the ability for schools to have a comprehensive counseling model. Lastly, the study supported the idea that social preparation to persist in higher education begins with the academic and social preparation afforded to students prior to college.

The findings also extend information about preparation for persistence through the college counseling programs at the schools. The literature highlights the need to prepare students for the rigor and social integration of college. Participant responses also spoke to the importance of helping students build social capital while they are in high school to help them establish relationships with individuals at their prospective institutions and increase the likelihood of their retention toward graduation. Moreover, participants also shared that helping students build self-sufficiency and independence during high school will prepare them to better navigate higher education and effectively use their resources.

The findings from this study highlight the importance of further study in the area of college counseling in charter high schools. Charter high schools show promising practices that may provide insight to strengthening college counseling programs and efforts to increase access and persistence for underrepresented students. The 2020 goal of increasing the percentage of individuals obtaining a college degree may be achieved through learning from innovative and

comprehensive counseling models that are yielding promising outcomes at schools that cater to students from underrepresented communities.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol and Questions

Date:| Time:

Subject: Online/Telephone/In-person Interview No.

Filename: Interview No. <numeric code>_<date>

The researcher will review the following information before beginning the interview:

You are one of the 8–15 participants to agree to be interviewed for this study.

This interview is intended to provide insight to the college counseling program in your high school and to understand your perception of the most important factor(s) in helping underrepresented students access and persist in higher education.

As a friendly confirmation of your eligibility for this study, I have four brief questions for you?

1. Have you been in your position for at one full academic year?
2. Are you currently employed at a college-preparatory charter high school in Los Angeles, California that has had at least three to five graduating classes as a school?
3. Does your school use A-G course requirements as graduation requirements?
4. Are you the individual at their school site responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the college counseling program at the site?

Thank you for responding to the questions.

I will be conducting a nine-question interview with you today and will take notes on our conversation during the interview. The interview will also be audio recorded, with your permission. The audio-recording will allow me to transcribe and analyze the data at a later time.

The transcript of your interview will be provided to you to review for accuracy of representation. You will be asked to kindly reply within one-week from the date that the transcript is sent to you with any revisions. If you do not have revisions to the transcript, you do not have to respond.

I assure you that your identity and your responses' connection to you will remain confidential. The aggregate data collected from all participants will be used to inform the overall purpose of the study without providing identifying information. The names and corresponding interview responses will be stored in password-protected files and will only be known to me. Each of the interview files will be assigned an identification code beginning with Interview_1_date to ensure participant confidentiality. Additionally, a minimum of two expertly trained coders will review the interview findings to ensure trustworthiness of the data findings. All documents and data associated to this study will be securely stored for a minimum of three years and no later than five, at which time it will be destroyed.

As a friendly reminder, your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with me, your institution, or profession.

To ensure that you are aware of all of the parts of the study and your role, I kindly request that you review the waiver of consent and sign agreeing to your participation in this study. You may choose to withdraw at any time without penalty, and/or take a short break during the interview as needed. Please acknowledge your agreement to participate in this study and confirm that you understand the Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study.

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Thank you for your participation in this interview.

Interview Questions

1. What is the goal of your position?
2. How much of your time is spent on college counseling versus non-college counseling responsibilities?
3. Tell me about the goals of your program.
4. Tell me about the design of your college counseling program.
5. Tell me about the implementation of your college counseling program.
6. Tell me about the outcomes of your program.
7. What is your level of comfort with providing college financial aid information and assistance to students and their families?
8. Tell me what you perceive as most important in a college-going culture.
9. Tell me what you perceive as most important in a college-going culture to help underrepresented students access and persist in higher education.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study

A Phenomenological Study of Counselors Helping Underrepresented Students from
Los Angeles Charter High Schools Access and Persist in Higher Education

The following information is provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in a research study. Please take your time to read the information below and feel free to ask any questions before signing this document.

My name is Margarita Landeros, and I am a Doctoral student in the Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy program at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. The professor supervising my work is Dr. Linda Purrington. The title of my research study is “A Phenomenological Study of Counselors Helping Underrepresented Students from Los Angeles Charter High Schools Access and Persist in Higher Education” and is being done as partial requirement for my Doctoral degree.

Purpose of Research Study: The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is twofold: a) to describe and compare the goals, design, implementation and outcomes of college counseling programs in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles as experienced and shared by high school college counselors and b) to explore what college preparatory charter high school college counselors perceive to be the most important components in a charter high school college-going culture to assist underrepresented students with access to college and preparation to persist in higher education.

Procedures: If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an in-person or online interview with the researcher prior to February 1, 2015. The interview

will be no longer than one-hour in length. The researcher will ask nine questions during the interview and responses will be audio-recorded. After the interview, the researcher will transcribe the interview's audio-recording and send the transcript to you for your review. During this review, you will be given one-week to make any modifications you deem necessary.

Potential Risks: The potential risks for this study may include emotional discomfort, boredom, and fatigue. In the event that you experience emotional discomfort, boredom, or fatigue at any point during the interview, you may request a break, the recording device to be turned off, refuse to answer any questions, or to end the interview without being questioned. Participation is strictly voluntary.

Potential Benefit: The social benefits of the study are intended to be an increase in understanding the goals, design, implementation and outcomes of college counseling programs in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles and to explore what college preparatory charter high school college counselors perceive to be the of the most important components in a charter high school college-going culture to assist underrepresented students access to higher education. The results from the study may provide other charter schools with information that might be utilized to strengthen their college counseling programs and promote greater enrollment rates of their students into higher education institutions. Lastly, results may also support policy-making professionals, school districts, schools and college access professionals with identifying core principles that will support with college readiness and matriculation for students from charter high schools, underrepresented backgrounds and from urban communities.

Voluntary/right to deny or withdraw from participation: Your participation in the research study is completely voluntary, and you have the right to deny, withdraw or refuse to

participate at any time, without negative consequences to you.

Confidentiality: Data obtained for this research study, including your responses to the survey will be kept confidential. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under California law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adult is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others. The audio-recording and transcript will be encrypted and password-saved in the researcher's computer. The results of this research study will be summarized as a whole, as so no persons will identify you. All files will be saved for three years after the study and then destroyed.

Contact information for questions or concerns: If you have further questions regarding this research, you may contact me, the primary investigator, Margarita Landeros at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED], or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Linda Purrington at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED]. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis, Chairperson of the GPS IRB at Pepperdine University at gpsirb@pepperdine.edu or (310) 568-5753.

Consent to participate in research:

I understand that this research study has been reviewed by Graduate and Professional Schools (GPS) Institutional Review Board, Pepperdine University. For research-related problems or questions regarding participants' rights, I may contact Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis, Chairperson of the GPS IRB at Pepperdine University at gpsirb@pepperdine.edu, (310) 568-5753.

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

By signing this document, I consent to participate in this study.

Research Participant's Full Name (Print)

Research Participant's SignatureDate

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

Margarita Landeros, Principal Investigator (Print)

Margarita Landeros, Principal Investigator SignatureDate

APPENDIX C

Initial Recruitment Email

Dear Principal/Charter Network Representative of School/Charter Network, College Outreach Organization x,

My name is Margarita Landeros, and I am a Doctoral student in the Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy program at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I currently serve as a charter school college counselor and thus conducting my dissertation on college counseling programs at charter schools in Los Angeles. I am reaching out to you requesting your support with my study, which is being done as partial requirement for my Doctoral Degree.

My study focuses on highlighting the work being done by College Counselor or individuals in a similar capacity responsible for implementing the day-to-day functions of the college-counseling program working with underrepresented students. I am seeking counselors who would be willing to participate in my study and thus I am reaching out to you in efforts to find potential participants at your respective school(s). I am recruiting individuals who meet the following criteria:

- Have at least one full academic year of experience in their given position at that school
- Be employed at a college-preparatory charter high school in Los Angeles, California that has had at least three to five graduating classes as a school, and that has A-G course requirements as part of the graduation requirements
- Be the individual at their school site responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the college counseling program at the site

I attached additional information regarding the study and welcome any questions that you may have regarding my research as you consider sharing this with your College Counselor(s) or individual(s) in a similar capacity. If your *organization* is able to help me, I would kindly request a brief statement on your letterhead for me to submit to my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

If you have further questions regarding this research, you may contact me, the primary investigator, Margarita Landeros at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED], or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Linda Purrington at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED]. If your counselor or someone in a similar capacity would like to inquire further or participate in the study, please have them email me at [REDACTED] or call me at [REDACTED]. I welcome any questions that you may have regarding my research and look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Margarita Landeros

Principal Investigator

Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy

APPENDIX D

Follow-up Recruitment Email

Dear Principal/Charter Network Representative of School/Charter Network, College Outreach Organization x,

I hope that this email finds you well. I am following up on an email I sent a few weeks ago inviting you to support me in my study for my doctoral degree. My goal through this study is to highlight the work that college-preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles, California are doing in regards to college access and preparation to persist in higher education for underrepresented students. I included the information from the first email below and hope that you consider supporting me in this process.

My name is Margarita Landeros, and I am a Doctoral student in the Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy program at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I currently serve as a charter school college counselor and thus conducting my dissertation on college counseling programs at charter schools in Los Angeles. I am reaching out to you requesting your support with my study, which is being done as partial requirement for my Doctoral Degree.

My study focuses on highlighting the work being done by College Counselor or individuals in a similar capacity responsible for implementing the day-to-day functions of the college-counseling program working with underrepresented students. I am seeking counselors who would be willing to participate in my study and thus I am reaching out to you in efforts to find potential participants at your respective school(s). I am recruiting individuals who meet the following criteria:

Have at least one full academic year of experience in their given position at that school

Be employed at a college-preparatory charter high school in Los Angeles, California that has had at least three to five graduating classes as a school, and that has A-G course requirements as part of the graduation requirements

Be the individual at their school site responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the college counseling program at the site

I attached additional information regarding the study and welcome any questions that you may have regarding my research as you consider sharing this with your College Counselor(s) or individual(s) in a similar capacity. If your *organization* is able to help me, I would kindly request a brief statement on your letterhead for me to submit to my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

If you have further questions regarding this research, you may contact me, the primary investigator, Margarita Landeros at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED], or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Linda Purrington at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED]. If your counselor or someone in a similar capacity would like to inquire further or participate in the study, please have them email me at [REDACTED] or call me at [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] I welcome any questions that you may have regarding my research and look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Margarita Landeros

Principal Investigator

Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy

APPENDIX E

Information Form

A Phenomenological Study of Counselors Helping Underrepresented Students from Los Angeles Charter High Schools Access and Persist in Higher Education

The following information is provided to provide more insight on the research study.

My name is Margarita Landeros, and I am a Doctoral student in the Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy program at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. The professor supervising my work is Dr. Linda Purrington. The title of my research study is “A Phenomenological Study of Counselors Helping Underrepresented Students from Los Angeles Charter High Schools Access and Persist in Higher Education” and is being done as partial requirement for my Doctoral degree.

Purpose of Research Study: The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is twofold: a) to describe and compare the goals, design, implementation and outcomes of college counseling programs in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles as experienced and shared by high school college counselors and b) to explore what college preparatory charter high school college counselors perceive to be the most important components in a charter high school college-going culture to assist underrepresented students with access to college and preparation to persist in higher education.

Procedures: If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an in-person or online interview with the researcher prior to February 1, 2015. The interview will be no longer than one-hour in length. The researcher will ask nine questions during the interview and responses will be audio-recorded. After the interview, the researcher will transcribe the interview’s audio-recording and send the transcript to you for your review. During this review,

you will be given one-week to make any modifications you deem necessary.

Potential Risks: The potential risks for this study may include emotional discomfort, boredom, and fatigue. In the event that you experience emotional discomfort, boredom, or fatigue at any point during the interview, you may request a break, the recording device to be turned off, refuse to answer any questions, or to end the interview without being questioned. Participation is strictly voluntary.

Potential Benefits: The social benefits of the study are intended to be an increase in understanding the goals, design, implementation and outcomes of college counseling programs in college preparatory charter high schools in Los Angeles and to explore what college preparatory charter high school college counselors perceive to be the of the most important components in a charter high school college-going culture to assist underrepresented students access to higher education. The results from the study may provide other charter schools with information that might be utilized to strengthen their college counseling programs and promote greater enrollment rates of their students into higher education institutions. Lastly, results may also support policy-making professionals, school districts, schools and college access professionals with identifying core principles that will support with college readiness and matriculation for students from charter high schools, underrepresented backgrounds and from urban communities.

Voluntary/right to deny or withdraw from participation: Your participation in the research study is completely voluntary, and you have the right to deny, withdraw or refuse to participate at any time, without negative consequences to you.

Confidentiality: Data obtained for this research study, including your responses to the survey will be kept confidential. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in

accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under California law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adult is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others. The audio-recording and transcript will be encrypted and password-saved in the researcher's computer. The results of this research study will be summarized as a whole, as so no persons will identify you. All files will be saved for three years after the study and then destroyed.

Contact information for questions or concerns: If you have further questions regarding this research, you may contact me, the primary investigator, Margarita Landeros at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED], or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Linda Purrington at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED]. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis, Chairperson of the GPS IRB at Pepperdine University at gpsirb@pepperdine.edu or (310) 568-5753.

APPENDIX F

Interview Scheduling Email

Dear Prospective Participant,

Thank you for your participation in the interview for my study regarding college-going culture and counseling in college-preparatory charter high schools. Interviewing participants with experience implementing the college counseling program at their schools will help provide in-depth insight to the work that they are doing on a daily basis to help underrepresented students with access to college and preparation to persist in higher education.

I would like to conduct all interviews within the next month, preferably in the afternoon or on weekends. I kindly request that you provide me with your availability by [Date], along with your preference of in-person, phone, or Skype/Google Hangout Interview. I will do my best to be available for your first preference of time and date. Attached to this email, you will find the interview questions.

Thank you very much once again for your willingness to participate in my study. I look forward to our interview and learning about your experience as a college counselor or similar capacity in a college-preparatory charter high school.

Best regards,

Margarita Landeros

Principal Investigator

Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy

APPENDIX G

Demographic Survey

1. Have you been in your position for at one full academic year?
2. Are you currently employed at a college-preparatory charter high school in Los Angeles, California that has had at least three to five graduating classes as a school?
3. Does your school use A-G course requirements as graduation requirements?
4. Are you the individual at their school site responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the college counseling program at the site?

APPENDIX H

Social Media Post

Attention colleagues and friends: Are you a college counselor or in a similar capacity at a college-preparatory charter high school in Los Angeles responsible for the daily functions of your schools' college counseling program? Have you been in this position for at least one full academic year? Has your school had at least three to five graduating classes and use A-G course requirements as part of graduation requirements? If you answered "YES" to all of the questions, I would like to invite you to participate in my doctoral dissertation study. Feel free to message me via Facebook or email me at [REDACTED] if you have any questions and/or are interested in participating. Thank you very much!

APPENDIX I

Interview Transcript Review and Thank You

Dear Interview Participant,

Thank you for your participation in my study regarding college-going culture and counseling in college-preparatory charter high schools.

Please review the attached transcript from your interview for accuracy of representation. Please let me know if you have any edits needed in order for the transcript to best represent your responses. If you have any edits, please respond by 11:59 PM PST on *Day, Month Day, Year*.

Thank you very much once again for your willingness to participate in my research. It was a pleasure speaking with you and learning about your college counseling program and your perceptions on supporting underrepresented students.

Best regards,

Margarita Landeros

Principal Investigator

Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy

APPENDIX J

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

December 19, 2014



Protocol #: [REDACTED]

Project Title: A Phenomenological Study of Counselors Helping Underrepresented Students from Los Angeles Charter High Schools Access and Persist in Higher Education

Dear Ms. Landeros:

Thank you for submitting your application, *A Phenomenological Study of Counselors Helping Underrepresented Students from Los Angeles Charter High Schools Access and Persist in Higher Education*, for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB appreciates the work you and your faculty advisor, Dr. Purrington, have done on the proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations (45 CFR 46 - <http://www.nihtraining.com/ohsrsite/guidelines/45cfr46.html>) that govern the protections of human subjects. Specifically, section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) states:

(b) Unless otherwise required by Department or Agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:

Category (2) of 45 CFR 46.101, research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: a) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a **Request for Modification Form** to the GPS IRB. Because your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to "policy material" at <http://www.pepperdine.edu/irbi/graduate/>).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact Kevin Collins, Manager of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at gpsirb@pepperdine.edu. On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thema Bryant-Davis".

Thema Bryant-Davis, Ph.D.
Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives
Mr. Brett Leach, Compliance Attorney
Dr. Linda Purrington, Faculty Advisor