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Abstract

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Policies Affecting Post-Traditional Students and Students Facing Economic Instability at the Community College

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A Dissertation in Practice

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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by

Joshua Bowens

August 2021

Advisor: Cecilia Orphan, Ph.D.

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Title: Policies Affecting Post-Traditional Students and Students Facing Economic Instability at the Community College
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Abstract

The following dissertation in practice researches policies from the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) that relate to Post-Traditional students and students experiencing economic instability. Using a conceptual framework of Motivational Theory (Maslow, 1943; Harrigan & Lamport-Commons, 2015; Herzberg, 1959) and the Principal-Agent theory (Jensen, & Meckling, 1976), this dissertation focuses on how one community college (CC) within the CCCS system interprets and implements those policies both college and campus wide, as well as departmentally. Although many studies exist pertaining to community college students, literature pertaining to Post-Traditional students in a community college setting has not been fully explored. This will be accomplished in this study through the experiences of employees at CC that work directly with this population. This study seeks to make recommendations at the system level regarding policies and at the college wide regarding implementation of those policies to increase graduation rates for Post-Traditional students experiencing economic instability.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As the semester ends, Elise is devastated that she has failed her courses; she has had so much going on in her personal and professional life that school was at the bottom of her priority list. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated example. In the United States, as many as 14% of community college students are homeless and 50% of college students in general suffer from aspects of housing and/or food insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, et al., 2017). Other students must contend with working full time or providing for their families, many of whom struggle to even do that while attending school (NCES, 2002; PNPI, 2018). Living with long-term poverty-induced stress has been shown to have profound negative effects on both the student and their family, including depression, anxiety, and physical ailments as well as changes to social and cognitive behavior, and decision-making skills (DaCarlo-Santiago, et al. 2011). One casualty of living with poverty-induced stress is college; students can struggle academically leading them to withdraw from classes and not finish their program. In fact, according to the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (PNPI) (2018), almost half of students enrolled at a community college that have additional responsibilities outside of the classroom do graduate from their program within three years after enrollment; the withdrawal rate at four-year universities is even higher at 85%.

This chapter gives a brief overview of the study population, reviews the statement of the problem, and discusses the purpose of the research. Then I state and explain the research questions for the study and give an overview of theoretical frameworks and methodologies used in this study. Finally, I give a brief overview of the findings from the study, review the significance of the study, and define key terms that are used throughout the study.

How Being Low-income Affects College Students

Over 14% of community college students reported being homeless on their federal aid assistance applications (Cohen, 2019). Being homeless while in college entails a large set of challenges that other student groups do not have to face. While students often receive federal assistance for food or donated classroom materials while in elementary or high school, educational institutions which have a larger amounts of federal and state funding set aside for these situations, assistance for physiological necessities as an adult are often difficult to come by (Goldrick-Rab, et al., 2017). Therefore, students can struggle to even get nourishment let alone housing, leaving affected students to focus more on securing necessities rather than on completing college coursework.

Even when students have a job, they may struggle to provide for themselves and their families. Postsecondary National Policy Institute (PNPI) (2018) reports that over 50% of students 24-26, 33% of students 30-39, and 25% of students 40 and older have an annual income of less than $20,000. Additionally, 66% of unmarried students who are parents also have an annual income of less than $20,000. Although pursuing postsecondary education can beneficially lead to higher paying jobs, increased job security, better physical and mental health outcomes, and higher rates of civic participation, these students often have additional responsibilities that can complicate obtaining a postsecondary education (Nietzel, 2020; Loveless, n.d.; Hurtado & DeAngelo, 2012; Goldrick-Rab & Sorenson, 2010). The bulk of female student parents state that spending time on schoolwork often takes last priority over caring for their family and work (PNPI, 2018). This often leads to a catch-22 where students understand that receiving a college education can open proverbial doors to help provide a better life for themselves and their families, but they do not have the time to do so, which can end up spiraling into a bigger issue as the struggle to provide is prolonged.

Economic Instability

Unfortunately, life circumstances can make it difficult for students to pursue the education needed to break the cycle of poverty some families experience and increase income and overall life satisfaction. Hill and colleagues (2017) define economic instability as having repeatedly unexpected or unintentional changes in employment, financial status, or income over time. Numerous studies have been conducted on economic instability (e.g., Moffitt & Gottschalk, 2012; Gosselin and Zimmerman 2008; Gennetian et al., 2015; Hardy and Ziliak 2014), all of which show an increase in economic instability over the last 40 years, however, economic instability is most prominent in households where the members have less education and families that have less gross income. The chances of experiencing long periods of economic instability dramatically decrease as familial educational level increases. Therefore, pursuing a higher education is extremely important in order to decrease the likelihood of experiencing economic instability and working to break the cycle of poverty.

Policies to Address Economic Instability

In an attempt to address aspects of economic instability, many colleges have implemented meal assistance programs such as “swipe out hunger” (Lee, n.d.) and food pantries, or partnered with local housing authorities to provide housing vouchers to full time students (DHUD, n.d.). Additionally, the federal government has created programs such as TRiO and CCAMPIS (Child Care Access Means Parents in School); TRiO helps first-generation students, students with disabilities, and some students that are considered low income, and CCAMPIS provides childcare to low-income families while they are in class (United States Office of Postsecondary Education Federal Trio Programs, 2008).

I previously mentioned that only some students that are considered low income are provided with federal financial aid support. This is because TRiO and CCAMPIS are federal programs that are grant funded, meaning they have a limited budget (Allison Garcia, Personal Communication, September 18, 2019). Therefore, these programs are only help a fraction of eligible low-income students. The results from a 2018 study of students attending college showed that 42% of respondents experienced food insecurity within the last 30 days, and 59% experienced housing insecurity within the last year (The Hope Center, 2019). Furthermore, even when there are programs available, resource limitations only allow for minimum help to students, such as a few meals or a place to stay for a short time; however, there is a great likelihood that a student will still be experiencing housing or food insecurity even after utilizing campus resources. According to Allyson Garcia, the Director of TRiO at MSU Denver, many TRiO programs do not have technology classes or classes geared toward supporting families – with entertainment like baskets of toys or games for children to enjoy while the parents work or learn – so many older students and students with families cannot adequately utilize the services (Personal communication, September 18, 2019). Therefore, campus-based programs are still needed to better serve more of these students.

Post-Traditional Students

One demographic group of students that is greatly affected by economic instability while pursuing a degree or certificate program is Post-Traditional students (PT). students. Much of the literature regarding college students addresses the unique needs of non-traditional students. However, as Trowler (2015) points out, traditional students - which are defined as: students with no major life responsibilities such as having dependents or full-time jobs, are under the age of 25 and enter college after high school graduation, and attend college full time (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) - are normalized and considered the standard of student population, which is problematic for the following reasons. The term non-traditional applies to students who do not fit the traditional student model of going to a four-year university straight after graduating high school. However, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.), 73% of college students are considered non-traditional. Therefore, this population of students is more common than the term may lead one to believe and are in fact most college students, making them the norm. As such, Soares and Vanaas (2013; 2018) suggest using the term "post-traditional", to give a more positive lens to this demographic of students. For this study, I will use this term given that it better represents the experiences of this student demographic. Additionally, the term "post-traditional" does not norm the student population to the standard of traditional students; rather, the term challenges the definition of a traditional student by implying that a traditional student population no longer exists.

PT students exhibit one of more of the following qualities: they delay enrolling in college after high school, attend part time, work full time while in college, are considered financially independent - meaning they have no one financially supporting them - or they have dependents such as a spouse or children (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Baum and Ma (2016) state that 20% of all community college students started college after the age of 25. According to the NCES, as of the 2011-2012 aid year - the last reported aid year currently available - 48.8% of white students, 64.5% of black students, 50.3% of Latinx students, 41.1% of Asian students, and 51.5% of students identifying as an unidentified race were considered independent for financial aid purposes, meaning they were over the age of 24 or they had dependents for whom they provided over 50% support (NCES, 2015).

Furthermore, the National Center for Education Statistics found that PT students are more likely to be low-income and require financial assistance to attend college. The average unmet need for independent PT students without a spouse or children is $5,000, and even more of an unmet need for PT students with dependents whose average unmet need is $5,500 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). As a result, many students attempt to earn a postsecondary education, but overall, completion rates for PT students remain low due to insufficient academic preparation, financial and time constraints, and responsibilities that take the focus away from schoolwork (Goldrick-Rab & Sorenson, 2010). In fact, 66% of PT students who started during the 2003-2004 academic year did not finish a certificate or degree program within six years (PNPI, 2018).

Post-Traditional Students and Community College

PT students often seek out sub-baccalaureate and community college options. Because so many PT students attend community colleges, it is important to take a deeper look into this sector. According to the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (2018), 51% of students with dependents enroll at Associate degree granting institutions, as well as 47% of students age 24-39 and 52% ages 40 and older (PNPI, 2018). The students cite flexible courses and short-term degrees as reasons they attend community colleges rather than four year institutions.

Statement of the Problem

Post-Traditional students and students facing economic instability are two distinct populations. However, as the literature described herein shows, there is overlap between these two populations. PT students, on average, have a higher incidence of economic instability than students who are not Post-Traditional (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002; PNPI, 2018). This study examines both populations.

In the context of the community college, Bronton and Goldrick-Rab (2018) state there is a shortage of policies focused on the unique needs of PT students and students dealing with economic instability. The authors speculate the cause stemming from a misconception about the affordability of community college; they suggest that many low-income students are attracted to the idea of financial aid and assume that they will be able to receive generous refunds to help pay their bills while attending school. However, the authors found the average community college costs over $8,000 a year out of pocket after any state, federal, or institutional "for dependent students from families in the lowest income quartile" (Bronton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018, 129); this cost includes the tuition and fees, books, room and board, and other educational related expenses - generally referred to as Cost of Attendance (COA). Despite collecting significant revenues through tuition and fees, colleges rarely have additional funds to spare to support PT students or students dealing with economic instability, as the majority of the tuition and fees collected goes toward payroll for the college employees ([Name withheld], Personal communication, April 21, 2021). Furthermore, students often struggle at the community college level due the cost for materials on top of the tuition price, which can prove to be too much for many students that already have many demands placed on their incomes (Bronton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018).

Unfortunately, students may not be able to utilize financial aid to fully pay for the tuition and education related expenses either. While the price of tuition has steadily increased year over year, the maximum Pell grant available to students has not kept up with the price of tuition; the Maximum Pell grant for the 2021-2022 academic year is a total of $6,495 for the year (FSA, 2021). This means that a student only receiving the Pell grant would only be able to pay $6,495 out of the $8,000 mentioned above, leaving over $1,500 that students must pay out of pocket. Given that the COA of $8,000 is just the average, meaning that many students may have to pay significantly more out of pocket, depending on the cost of other expenses, such as childcare, room and board and other bills.

Unfortunately, Colorado has, per capita, one of the lowest public funding levels per student among all 50 states. For the 2019 fiscal year, Colorado ranked among the fourth quartile, only providing an average of $4,553 per student (SHEEO, 2020). Compare that to Wyoming, for example, where the per student support amount exceeds $15,000 at $15,343 per student, despite having a lower overall cost of living (SHEEO, 2020). The average support that students in Colorado receive for higher education, therefore, does not even fully cover the cost of full-time tuition and education related expenses at the state's community colleges. Furthermore, this amount does not include the summer semester, which could tack on an additional $2,300 for a full-time summer semester, not including the additional costs. Therefore, students can still struggle to pay the tuition while still attempting to pay for the rest of their expenses. As such, research is needed to understand what policies the CCCS does to help this demographic of students be successful in community college.

In recognition of the financial challenges faced by many of its students, the CCCS has issued policies that can generally be applied to all of the colleges within the system. The coordination of the system policies through all the institutions can affect how students receive aid at any particular institution; although the CCCS provides guidelines for interpreting the policies, it is up to the individual colleges to implement the policies based on their understanding of the policy guidance from the system president (Dr. Elena Sandoval-Lucero, Personal communication, May 16,2019). The systems often issue policy directives to campuses, but because the campuses are left to interpret those directives, the resulting actions may or may not support students.

Purpose of the Research

This qualitative study examines both the Colorado Community College System's policies regarding student economic instability and how one college that has multiple campuses within the system interprets and implements those policies - for the purposes of the study, the college will be referred to as “the community college” (CC). According to LiCalisi and colleauges (2016), universal school policies are well intentioned to be able to apply to as many students as possible; however, these policies tend to exacerbate inequalities among families with disadvantaged backgrounds, such as PT students that are looking to return to the workforce or students experiencing economic instability. The study examined CCCS policies to determine what policies applied to PT students and students experiencing economic instability. Then I performed a program evaluation of one school within the system to determine how CCCS policies supported the academic success of PT students and students facing economic instability. Finally, I recommended changes to the system policies as well as how the community college implements those policies - both at an institutional and a departmental level - to better support these students.

Research Questions

This study was driven by these research questions:

RQ1: What Colorado Community College System (CCCS) policies are in place that affect Post-Traditional students and students facing economic instability?

a. What is the focus - academic or financial - of these policies?

RQ2: How did one community college within the system implement those policies, within individual departments, and in the classroom?

RQ3: How does the implementation of policies at the individual college level affect the ability of Post-Traditional students and students dealing with economic instability to be successful within the classroom?

I theorize that neoliberal ideology serves as the backdrop for the study by outlining the urgency for students to obtain an education (Giroux, 2014). Using Motivational Theory, I also theorize that students may struggle to perform well in classes when they are faced with competing priorities. Motivational theory considers basic needs, so if students' basic needs are not met - such as having shelter, or enough food and water - there is a greater likelihood that a student will focus on meeting those basic needs rather than higher level needs like successfully passing courses (Maslow, 1943). However, considering the urgent need for education and the possible advantages that an education can bring, it is possible that students can still be successful despite their current circumstances (Maslow, 1943; Harrigan & Lamport-Commons, 2015; Herzberg, 1959). Therefore, I explore the CCCS system's policies to determine which policies apply to PT students and students experiencing economic instability and the effect of those policies on the ability of these students to be successful in classrooms.

Theoretical Frameworks

As will be discussed in chapter two, the community college is very diverse, with diverse student demographics, institutional diversity, types of community colleges, etc. Pragmatic theory is based on the premise that no one specific viewpoint is fully satisfactory, and that approaching a topic from multiple viewpoints is the key to fully understanding the topic (Pragmatism, n.d.). Therefore, to properly capture multiple aspects of the pragmatic nature of the community college, it is important to approach the study with multiple frameworks. This study is situated in a backdrop of neoliberal theory, and I use a conceptual framework with elements of motivational theory and the principal agent theory. Using these theories allow for a more complete picture of the community college system and its policies.

Neoliberal theory, in its basic form, focuses on market-oriented reform in order to influence the economy (Vincent, 2009), marked by measures and outcomes - performance indicators - to determine how well a person or business functions in a given context(Olsen & Peters, 2007). To ensure that employers hire employees that can function well in a position, higher education, and more specifically, community colleges have adapted to provide students with the skills through which they can prove their skills to potential employers, thus increasing the likelihood of being hired (Mollenkopf-Pigsley, 2015). This idea is used as the backdrop of the study in that the need for an education to be able to earn a well-paying job has created an atmosphere of urgency for students to enroll.

Motivational theory suggests that people are not able to meet higher level needs such as esteem and self-actualization, if their basic needs such as food and shelter are not met (Maslow, 1943). In this case, students can have a difficult time successfully completing their classes - that is, meeting those performance indicators. Herzberg (1959) and Lamport-Commons (2015) argue the reason that people are unable to obtain higher levels on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is because they lack motivation to do so; however, it is possible with the right motivation, to pursue the higher-level needs despite not having more basic needs met. Because PT students and students experiencing economic instability often have other factors shifting their focus, I wanted to explore how the community college worked with these students to be successful in the classes.

In order to explore how the community college worked with the students, it was important to understand more about the relationship between the CCCS and the individual schools; I used Principal-Agent theory to examine this relationship (Laffont & Martimort, 2002). The principal - in this case the CCCS - makes broad decisions that affect the agent - in this case the individual community college, but the individual college must implement those changes based on the agent's individual needs. Therefore, there can be a discrepancy between what the principal expects and what is actually accomplished. The CCCS dictates vague policies in order that they can be implemented by the diverse institutions in the system, but the individual colleges must implement the policies based on their understanding of the broad language and the needs of their student body.

I created a conceptual framework that explained the interweaving relationships between these three theories as it relates to the CCCS, the individual community college, and PT students and students dealing with economic instability. Because it is a complex system that is difficult to set one policy that will apply to multiple institutions, the CCCS must create very vague policies that are interpreted and implemented by the individual colleges based on those colleges' needs, which then affect the ability of students to be successful in classes. This study explored the policies developed by the CCCS that pertain to PT students and students dealing with economic instability, how the individual schools implemented those policies, and ultimately how that implementation affected the students' ability to be successful - all with the intention of presenting the recommendations to both the CCCS and the individual community college to help increase the students' ability to be successful in the classroom.

Methodology for the Study

In the same way that I used multiple theories to inform my study, I also took different methodological approaches to the study. I used a content analysis methodology (Holsti, 1969) to examine the CCCS policies to determine which policies affect PT students and students experiencing economic instability. Then, I used a Utilization Focused Evaluation methodology (Patton, 2008), coupled with an inductive thematic analysis, to conduct and analyze the study and determine how the different departments within the college interpret and implement the CCCS policies, ultimately reviewing how these implementations affect the ability of PT students and students dealing with economic instability to be successful in classes.

Because the CCCS had a plethora of policies, I needed to use a content analysis to narrow down the policies that apply to PT students or students experiencing economic instability. The Holsti content analysis method differentiates and sorts materials in a given data set based on specific keywords, concepts or characteristics (Holsti, 1969). Because policy makers do not have a working definition for PT students or economic instability, I focused on themes found within the policies to determine which policies applied to all students in general, and those that did not. I then narrowed the remaining policies that dealt directly with students and separated them into categories by whether they would apply to the target student demographics or not.

Using these policies, I then adhered to the Utilization Focused Evaluation (UFE) method to create the evaluation. UFE is designed to allow the end user - in this case the individual community college - the opportunity to help craft the evaluation in order that the information can be then used by the end user to make changes to their operations

(Patton, 2008). Through consultation with the end user, I created an evaluation, for which the garnered answers could allow the individual community college to implement changes to how they operate, which could positively affect the ability of PT students and students dealing with economic instability to be successful in classrooms.

In order to suggest these recommendations for change to the end user, I first had to find meaningful data from the evaluations. Using a thematic inductive analysis, I gathered the data from the evaluations and found common themes between multiple participants. I then used these themes to create recommendations for both the CCCS and the individual community college to implement changes to have a positive effect on the students' ability to be successful in their programs, and by extension their degree or certificate programs.

Research Findings

The CCCS currently has 196 active policies that govern the system, but only 24 of those policies apply to PT students or students dealing with economic instability. Furthermore, none of those policies apply explicitly to those student populations; rather, the 24 policies affect PT students and students dealing with economic instability, but the policies can also be applied equally to all other students within the system as well. The policies are very vague in order to be able to equally apply to all colleges within the system. Therefore, in order to determine how the CC for the study interpreted and implements these policies, I created interview questions with information from the policies to ask participants at the CC.

Using the data gathered from 18 different participants conducted at CC, I identified two overarching themes that explored the topics of communication and fiscal restraints. With regard to the topic of communication, I identified the themes of communication between departments, issues with written communication, and issues with communication with students. For the fiscal restraints with the CC, I identified the themes of the inability to hire enough employees to address student needs and lack of available resources to adequately address student needs. These themes are explored further in chapter four.

Significance of Study

The significance of this study is two-fold. First, CCCS will benefit from the findings which can inform their policy design and implementation so that they can better support PT students and students dealing with economic instability on a system-wide scale. Secondly, I was able to propose initiatives to address the unmet needs of PT students and students facing economic instability within the individual colleges by analyzing the data from the interviews, which are discussed in chapter five. The Hope Center (2019) has stated that their plans for future research focus on how schools can address the issues of economic instability; this study works in conjunction with their goals as well as furthering their research specifically within the Colorado Community College System to address the needs of students dealing with economic instability. Chapter two examines the literature related to the study in depth.

Given all the challenges facing PT students and students facing economic instability, this study supports these student demographics through the analysis of all the CCCS policies to recommend what changes can be made to better support these students. According to the Colorado Department of Higher Education, Colorado has a total of 251,000 college students (Colleges & Universities, n.d.). Of the total student population, 125,000 - roughly half - attend community colleges within the CCCS (Facts & Figures, 2021). Therefore, any changes that are made as a result of the study would affect a significant number of students state-wide. The recommendations are also extremely important in a place like Colorado that has one of the lowest per student funding amounts in the country. To potentially receive increased funding for higher education, the government is dictated by the neoliberal aspects of performance indicators - colleges must justify the need for additional funding by showing that the programs and initiatives they are implementing are having a positive outcome, thus deserve additional funds to continue or expand. Thus, a positive correlation in the success of different student populations could elicit a positive response from the government in terms of future funding.

Key Terms

To ease in extending understanding of the scope of the study, in this section I provide definitions of key terms that I used throughout the study and dissertation. While these key terms have been introduced or will be later expanded upon later in this study, by defining these terms, I am clarifying my approach to the study. Additionally, as I worked with the individual community college for the study to help define these terms, I am including the terms to honor the informational needs for them as the end user. These key terms are addressed below.

Economic Instability

Hill and colleagues (2017) define economic instability as having repeatedly unexpected or unintentional changes in employment, financial status or income over time. For this study, economic instability could look like unexpected job loss, being underemployed, unemployed, experiencing housing or food insecurity, or have unexpected bills that make it difficult for the student to provide for themselves and their family.

Post-Traditional Students

PT students exhibit one or more of the following qualities: they delay in enrolling in college out of high school, only attend part time, work full time while in college, are considered financially independent - meaning they have no one supporting them - or they have dependents such as a spouse or children (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Furthermore, according to the NCES, a large majority of community college students now fit into the “non-traditional category (NCES, 2002). As such, it is no longer appropriate to refer to something as “non” when they are now the majority. Therefore, using the term post-traditional as opposed to non-traditional provides this student demographic with a more positive lens and in fact acknowledges their majority status within higher education.

Summary

This study encompasses both a policy analysis of the CCCS policies, and a program analysis on how an individual community college within the system interprets and implements those policies. The focus of the study is to determine how both of the analyses ultimately affect the ability of PT students and students facing economic instability to be successful in classes, and ultimately making recommendations to both the CCCS and the individual community college to positively affect that ability. The next chapter reviews the literature as it relates to the community college, PT students, economic instability, and the theories that frame the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This study is ultimately an evaluation of the Colorado Community College System's policies that affect post-traditional community college students facing economic instability, which is highlighted through the Community College (CC) used in this study's interpretations and implementations of those policies. However, this study does take a different approach than other similar studies in that the focus for the study is post-traditional community college students. While many studies have been conducted on elements of economic instability for college students (Goldrick-Rab, 2017; Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Dominguez-Whitehead, 2017, Crutchfield & Meyer-Adams, 2019; Erisman & Steele, 2012), only one prominent author - Sarah Goldrick-Rab - has extensively studied economic instability among community college students, with The Hope Center specifically created to help students in the community college center (The Hope Center, 2020). However, I could not identify any studies on the particular demographic of Post-Traditional students within community college. Additionally, there is even less literature specifically on the effect of Colorado Community College System (CCCS) policies on Post-Traditional students or students facing economic instability. Therefore, this study seeks to address the gap to determine what CCCS policies address economic instability for post-traditional students, what the focus of those policies are, and how individual schools in the system interpret and implement those policies.

This study employs neoliberal theory as a backdrop for the academic landscape, but due to the diverse landscape of community colleges and their students, the studyutilizes the concepts of motivational theory and principal-agent theory to provide a framework for contextualizing the literature. I begin with a description of these theories. I then consider the importance of the history of higher education and the changing mission for community colleges as it relates to the labor market outcomes for post-traditional students. Then I discuss some programs that seek to address issues of accessibility and success for community college students, and finally I examine current empirical literature on poverty psychology, generational poverty, and post-traditional students.

Theoretical Frameworks

Tinto's (1993) attrition model is one of the cornerstone frameworks for studying student success in higher education; a student's academic and social belonging - or lack thereof - is the determining factor in whether a student withdraws from school or ends up successfully completing college. However, this may not be true for community colleges and other campuses that enroll a large share of commuter and post-traditional students - Tinto's model is based solely on residential institutions and their students, but does not consider how commuter or no-traditional students succeed in college. In fact, external forces have a much greater effect on the likelihood for success for community college students such as working full time, having to provide for a family, as well as navigating the often complex social and political landscape of society. (Kember, 1983; Pascarella et al., 1983; Sieu, 2014). Additionally, Tinto's model did not examine the policy factors in college systems such as the CCCS, which may affect student success. As the focus of this study is on community college students, the aforementioned cornerstone attrition model is inappropriate. Therefore, in this section, I discuss the theories that are more appropriate - Neoliberal Theory, Theory of Motivation, and the Principal-Agent Theory as a framework - for the study. Community college demographics are extremely diverse, with a higher representation of minoritized students, older students, and full-time working students than that of traditional four-year colleges and universities (Community College Research Center, n.d.; Baum & Ma, 2016). A single theory may not be able to fully reflect the diversity of the community college. Thusly, using multiple theories, I am able to highlight a different aspect of the broad demographic make-up of the community college sphere.

Neoliberal Theory

Neoliberalism theory in its original form showed a positive correlation between society and free market trade; a modern take on laissez-faire - a policy that the economy, and by extension society, will be better off if the government does not interfere with business and trade (“laissez-faire economics”, n.d.). According to Beth Mintz (2021), neoliberalism has contributed to the long-term change in funding – the diminishment of federal funding - for colleges due to the neoliberal view of the student as a customer. Higher education has become a business, and therefore, it is a student’s choice to pursue a higher education, thus the student should be able to pay out of pocket (Mintz, 2021). Furthermore, treating higher education as a commodity has contributed to the increase of the cost of higher education as well. Following the neoliberal idea of free market trade, where a higher demand for a good or service results in a higher market price, thus an increased demand for a higher education ultimately results in increased costs for the education (Mintz, 2021).

Ironically, however, the increase is artificial due to another neoliberal idea of measured application and performance indicators. Michael Apple (2006) suggests that educational policies promoted and established by conservative governments - with a focus on capitalism (Hoover, 1987) - slowly replaced the original intent for higher education of intellectual inquiry and debate (Cohen, 2010) with a requirement for measured application and performance indicators; what Olssen and Peters call "Performativity" (2007). Performativity is intended to create targets by promoting entrepreneurial skills among students over inquiry and debate (Olssen & Peters, 2007). The artificial increased demand for higher education resulting in higher education prices due to the government and other business requiring that students to meet those performance indicators in order to be considered prepared for the workforce. Therefore, the demand for a higher education increases, and by extension, the price of higher education (Rossi, 2014).

Henry Giroux argues that, in practice, neoliberalism is about power; establishing class power through wealth consolidation, as the rich get richer and the gap between the rich and middle and low class grows wider (2014). Furthermore, Giroux theorizes that higher education is essentially the societal battlefield on which neoliberalism is being fought. He contends this is due to higher education being one of the last places where students learn critical-thinking skills, participate and engage in meaningful dialogue, and are able to be reflective and be challenged on their own views and beliefs including, why do they believe what they do and where these beliefs come from. Therefore, these students are more likely to speak out against the repercussions of neoliberalism, thus threatening its power i(Giroux, 2014). As a result, the government may reduce funding for colleges and universities due to the students speaking out against neoliberalism for threatening the government's power (Giroux, 2014).

In a higher education context, Elizabeth Popp Berman (2012) states the shift to conservative economic educational policies has transformed American universities into an economic generator by providing advancement research for the government and business industry. The partnership between the government or business industry and the university can be beneficial to both the economy and university. While the research may help advance a particular industry, thus creating more money for the company, the university can also benefit through increased revenue from industry; money allocated to the research budget is twice as likely to come from an industry partner than it did in the 1970s (Popp Berman, 2012; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2010). Part of the reason for the increase in partnerships between institutions and industry is because higher education funding has decreased significantly. In fact, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, states have collectively decreased spending for institutions by seven billion dollars in the last ten years alone - adjusted for inflation (Mitchell, et al., 2018) The lack of state funding and potential for private funding has led universities to actively seek out contracts with the federal government and industry leaders in order to increase the revenue for the university (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2010).

However, this partnership can come at a cost. In exchange for research – including students accessing industry internship - corporations may "donate" lab equipment specific to their company or give additional funds for teaching programs specific to their methods. Unfortunately, students often end up being under or unprepared for their responsibilities in their field – both socially and financially – after finishing the education. This is mainly due to everything they learned in the classroom or internship being specific to one company or industry (Boyd, 2011). It is in this context that Neoliberal theory serves as the backdrop for the academic landscape for this study.

Neoliberal Influence on Adult Learners. The tradition of active engagement with social movements is abundant in adult education (Holst, 2002). For example, adult education was a major contributing factor in determining international policy during the Cold War (Brookfield, 1987). Paul Robeson, who is often remembered as being the first African American, All American Football Player, became heavily involved with organizing large movements, including support for the Soviet Union. So much so, in fact, that the United States State Department took notice - they had to adjust their foreign policy to account for a large population of Americans being in support for the Soviet Union (Brookfield & Holst, 2010).

Adults have historically become more involved with social movements when they learn about why these social movements matter, and how their life and the life of their family can directly be affected (Holford, 1995). Essentially, involvement in social movements would help to create a more equitable society, thus helping to bolster the economy. However, according to Mark Abendroth (2014), neoliberal policies have actually narrowed the scope of adult education. Many laws passed, such as the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) - which fundamentally changed how adult education programs interacted with the federal government. The focus for these laws and policies was providing workforce development to create a strong economy, with which individuals could better thrive, thus enabling them to focus more on social and familial issues (Workforce Investment Act, 1998; Abendroth, 2014) - of which many of those issues have ironically been caused through neoliberal policies (Monbiot, 2016). In the context of neoliberal theory, I will now examine the role of motivational theory for Post-Traditional students in the community college setting.

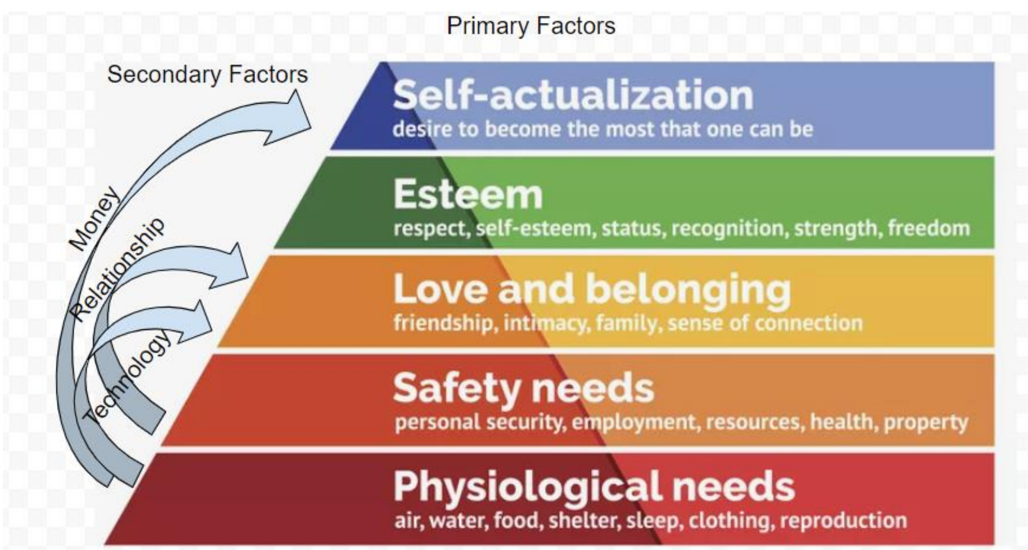
Motivation

In a 2017 interview, a Trump Administration Advisor, Jared Kushner said of the government, “The government should be run like a great company. Our hope is that we can achieve successes and efficiencies for our customers” (Johnson, 2017). According to political scientist Ethan Porter (2021), the idea of Americans as customers is indicative of the mindset that many Americans have; they value consumerism over citizenship. As such, people tend to make decisions that will benefit them directly; thus, a perceived negative outcome for themselves or family generally tends to produce little motivation to follow through with that decision. It is within this neoliberal context that this study uses the theoretical framework of motivation.

Maslow’s (1943) theory of needs is a psychological theory that focuses on motivation. Maslow argued that individuals could not fulfill the more complex levels of need until their basic needs are met. However, a major critique of Maslow’s theory is that it did not allow room for exceptions; if someone had not fulfilled the lower levels of the hierarchy, there was no way to fulfill the higher levels. Leonard Geller (1982) believed the catalyst for this personal growth was an internal process; a desire to strive for self-actualization - which is considered a higher-level Maslow’s hierarchy - despite the current circumstances. With this critique in mind, Harrigan and Lamport-Commons

(2015) theorized that there were more mitigating factors to consider in how and why a person would strive for a higher self-actualization level. The authors delineated primary and secondary factors that determine the hierarchy and argued that Maslow's levels are biological whereas secondary factors are learned (Harrigan and Lamport-Commons, 2015). When paired with the primary factors, secondary factors help influence the behaviors of the individual to focus on the higher levels of need despite their current circumstances. Someone may not have a home, food, etc. but they may understand that money – a secondary factor – can help them to fulfill the needs of the level they are in. Likewise, Oved (2017) suggests that love and relationships can be considered a secondary factor, such as a terminally sick person finding comfort by being with their loved ones. Furthermore, Dunmore (2013) argues for technology as an additional secondary factor for Maslow's hierarchy, such as having a social media account to cultivate a relationship with others even if their physiological needs have not been met (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.
Primary and Secondary Factors in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Extending the scope of motivation theory, Herzberg (1959) argues that while it is possible to fulfill the higher (primary) levels of the hierarchy – and people long to fulfil those higher levels - it can be extremely difficult to fulfill upper level needs if basic needs are unmet. Individuals often struggle because they lose the motivation to continue attending school to earn a degree; the individuals' struggles outweigh the future direct benefit of what that degree could provide. Deshields, et al. (2005) found a positive correlation of a student's satisfaction with their college experience and the student's success rates. The level of student's sense of satisfaction with delivery of higher education programs can be a predictor of motivation that a student will have to continue through their program (Stukalina, 2014). Therefore, it is important for a community college to focus on issues that dwindle a student's satisfaction through programs, organizational structure, and policies and procedures that are more focused on the needs of the student. This will in turn increase the likelihood for increasing students' motivation to work through issues and complete their degree.

Adult Learners and Motivation. According to Scott Campbell (2016) of the Council for Adult Learning and Experiential Learning (CAEL), adult learners display several differences in motivation when it comes to learning, compared with more traditional students. First, adult learners tend to be results oriented and more self-directed. This means that the adult learners tend to want to be responsible for the direction of their learning path and also want their outcomes to be more practical rather than theoretical. To accommodate this, many community colleges - including the CCCS - have instituted guided pathways, which is a course layout structure that allows students to have flexibility in choosing their classes but within a selected group of courses that will apply directly to the degree or certificate program in order to save both money and time for the student (CCCS, 2019).

Furthermore, adult learners tend to need to understand the reasoning behind learning a concept - the answer to why - before they are able to relate it to established ideas. Likewise, because each students' reasons are different for attending classes, their commitment levels will be different as well; some student pursue degrees because they need the education to pursue a particular career, while others may be required to go by their current employer, while still others may simply want to learn a new trade or hobby but do not have a financial reason behind it. As such, it is important to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all those in attendance. That being said, John Levin suggests that a majority of adult learners could be considered a disadvantaged population (2014). Many are considered disadvantaged due to their economic status, but also due to a myriad of other statuses including, "social, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds and conditions, as well as mental and physical functioning" (Levin, p.10, 2014). As such, community college professors need to be cognizant of the students' ability levels in the classroom in order to adjust their teaching to accommodate the differences in learning, such as taking time to go over how to use the internet properly for research for those that have not had the opportunity to utilize the internet on a regular basis.

Additionally, adult learners may also have more life experiences and wish to share them as it relates to the topic but are equally in need to be engaged because the adult learners are not legally required to be in school, so it is ultimately a choice to continue education. As a result, in order to increase an adult learner's motivation - the likelihood they will complete the particular program - it is important to utilize a program that makes good use of the students' backgrounds and knowledge, is frequently engaging and challenging, but also explains the relevance to the students and why the subject matters. To combat this potential lack of motivation for experienced students, many colleges have instituted a prior learning credit program, which can allow the completion of credits based on prior education, work, and life experiences; however the prior learning credit policy at the CCCS is left up to the individual college to determine how to address the assessment and application of the prior learning credits (CCCS, n.d.b.). I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter how neoliberalism has influenced community colleges, but first, the next section will look at several different relationships in the college system - which can be viewed from the lens of principal-agent theory - that may affect the students' ability to be successful.

Principal-Agent Theory

Just as motivation can contribute to the success of a student, the larger relationships between actors within the college system can also contribute to the success - or failure - of the student. The Principal-agent theory (PAT) focuses on the relationship between the principal, or the individual or company that owns an asset, and the company or individual contracted to manage that resource and act on behalf of the principal (Laffont & Martimort, 2002). Problems arise when the agent has their own agenda and acts of their own accord rather than on behalf of the principal. The agent may reduce responsibilities to work less efficiently for longer periods of time, or it may become difficult for the principal to ensure the agent is abiding by the contract if the relationship between the principal and agent is disproportionate (Jensen, M.C., & Meckling, W.H., 1976). One frequent occurrence of PAT in higher education is with performance-based funding. According to Muhammad Azfar Nisar (2014), in order to attempt to make college more affordable and accountable, Performance Based Funding (PBF) was established to allocate more funding to institutions based on their academic performance, using indicators such as retention and graduation rates. However, the author notes that PBF rarely works as intended. Because the funding is based solely on very few indicators, it is difficult for the institutions – the agent – to properly assess the effectiveness of their teaching (Azfar Nisar, 2014). Likewise, according to Harman (2000), universities have been known to simply pass students to inflate their graduation numbers - thus receiving more funding – instead of focusing on the quality of educational programming.

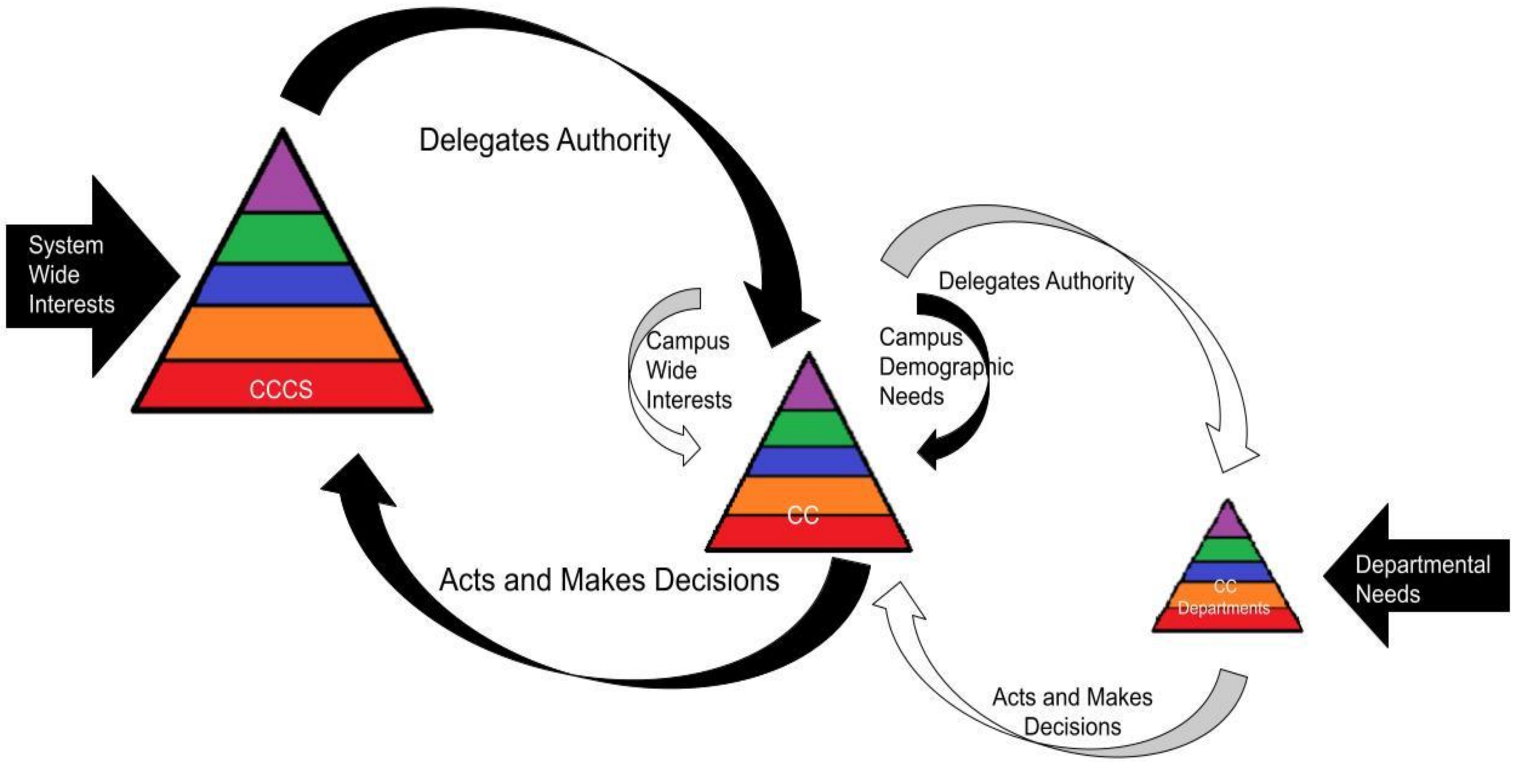
For this study, Principal-Agent Theory is used two-fold. First, to explain the relationship between the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) and the Community College (CC). The CCCS – the Principal – creates policies and provides guidelines for interpreting the policies, but it is up to the individual colleges – the Agent - to implement the policies based on their understanding of the policy guidance from the system president (Elena Sandoval-Lucero, Personal communication, May 16,2019). Secondly, although the college has campus wide procedures, each department within the college interprets and implements the procedures differently, thus a secondary Principal-Agent focus.

Conceptual Framework

From a pragmatic paradigm, the community college is very diverse, so using a single framework may not fully explain a particular phenomenon. This study argues that as a result of this diversity, the governing body must provide broad guidelines and directions, but the interpretation and implementation should be based on the needs of the current student population. The Colorado Community College System consists of thirteen community colleges across the state and serves more than 137,000 students annually ("About CCCS", n.d.), so the policies created must be broad enough to be applicable to the most students possible. However, the needs of each college can be drastically different. Thus, their interpretation of those policies must be tailored to the needs of their student body. Likewise, each department deals with different demographics of students, so how they interpret the campus-wide procedures depends on the students they are serving. More specifically, this framework argues that because the system wide interests are so broad, the needs of certain demographics of students are not being met, and therefore policies and procedures need to be re-examined in order to fully encapsulate the entire student population of the CCCS. In other words, the agent – whether that be the school or the individual department - must adapt their policies and procedures to accommodate their unique student body. These adaptations must also take into account the motivating factors that students are attending the institution in order to increase the likelihood that the students will attend through graduation. For example, one college may have very few students that need additional help filling out their FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), so the Office of Financial Aid does not have to overly invest in resources for FAFSA help, whereas another college may need a full time staff member to help students struggling to fill out the application.

This conceptual framework offers an examination of how the CCCS functions, reflecting the findings in the film, *The Ivory Tower* (Rossi, 2014), which examines - among other things - the prevalence of neoliberal management principles in college administrations. Systematically, the CCCS is a business, and in order to continue operating, the CCCS must generate income. Unfortunately, overall enrollment for colleges and universities continues to trend downward, meaning less revenue for the CCCS (Amour, 2020). Therefore, the CCCS, and by extension each individual college within the system, must strike a balance between generating policies that help to generate income through enrollment and motivating - or persuading - students that enrollment and completion of a degree or certificate is in their best interest. A visual representation of this conceptual framework is provided in Figure 2. As the figure shows, when a policy or procedure is given to the community colleges within the system, that policy must be broad enough to take account for all the community colleges within that system. However, the individual college must adapt that particular policy in the best interest of the demographics of their student policy - and still each department within the college must determine how to best enact those policies for the students that department most frequently helps. In doing so, the overall mission of the CCCS is achieved because the department acts and makes decisions on behalf of the college, and the college acts and makes decisions on behalf of the CCCS. This next section discusses community college in general to highlight the rationale the CCCS uses in determining their broad, system wide policies and procedures.

Figure 2.
Conceptual Framework to Guide Literature Review



Historical Background of the Community College

Higher education in the United States has significantly changed since its inception. In order to understand the current state of higher education, it is important to note the history. This section examines the broader history of higher education as well as the beginning and significance of the community college, all of which has evolved into the current labor driven market of higher education.

Higher Education

Higher education institutions were originally founded to prepare students - white men - to serve as clergymen (Thelin, 2019). The clergymen were seen as the aristocracy, and this idea evolved into the idea that the purpose of higher education was to train the country's intellectual elite. The education for these elitists entailed a liberal arts focus; philosophy, logic, astronomy, geometry, and ethics – the idea being that a well-rounded education would "[acculture] young people - their character formation, preparation for careers, access to society, language and manners" (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 32).

In the history of higher education, the shift to include Post-Traditional students was relatively recent. Eduard C. Lindeman (1925) championed the idea of adult education; he believed that if individuals stopped learning after they reached adulthood, they would be left behind, figuratively speaking, with the fast pace of society. This could lead to being passed over for new opportunities or being replaced with someone younger with "new" knowledge. Therefore, it was important to continue education, in order to be able to change with the times (Lindeman, 1925).

Community College

This aristocratic mindset became the foundation for the community college. In 1901, William Raney Harper separated out the first two years of higher education at University of Chicago and created what he called the "junior college" – which later became known as Joliet Junior College (Thelin, 2019). Due to growing demand for a postsecondary education, Harper hoped to separate the elite or upper level classes from those of the first two years of general education - what he likened to a continuation of high school rather than true higher education (Brint, & Karabel, 1989).

Despite Harper's original intention of viewing the community college as pedestrian, the community – or junior college – flourished, enough so that the popularity of community college in the 1930s created difficult situations for existing universities because their local communities controlled the community colleges rather than the larger universities (Thelin, 2019). The influx of community colleges was due in part to the work of the Higher Education for American Democracy Report – commonly referred to as The Truman Commission Report – which recommended the creation of a public community college network to provide students with a low or no cost option for higher education (United States, 1947; The American Presidency Project, n.d.). This was done through the addition of technical and vocational components for the various community colleges, depending on the current needs of the surrounding community (Thelin, 2019). Therefore, students had the option of taking general education classes to transfer to a four year university, a vocational or technical program to learn a particular craft or trade, or even taking classes for general interest for community members, considering the community college served the immediate community (Thelin, 2019).

Neoliberal Influence. However, with the addition of a curriculum based on labor market needs for the community came a shift in mission for community colleges and other postsecondary institutions. The mission shifted from the original liberal arts, civically minded mission to a mission driven by metrics such as full-time enrollments and overall completions (Mollenkopf-Pigsley, 2015). Patrick Sullivan notes that this shift to a more neoliberal mission, “led to an extraordinary diminishment of the public and civic functions of higher education” (p.192, 2017).

In order to determine if an employee is proficient at his or her craft, the employee is measured against a set of particular standards; if they meet those standards, the employee is proficient. However, if they do not meet the set standards, the employer can initiate interventions - trainings - to help the employee meet those expectations. It stands to reason, then, that a labor market driven curriculum should also abide by similar standards - metrics to determine whether the students are meeting the standards needed to be proficient in a labor market.

Accordingly, the effects of the discourse between the original intent for higher education and the current mission can still be seen reflected in many student aid programs today - such as promise programs; programs requiring full time enrollment to qualify for financial aid, consequently making it difficult for working students to receive the benefit of the programs (Klafehn and Odle, 2017). As a result, a paradox is created; there is still the underlying mission for community colleges to provide an opportunity for personal growth and education, but the focus must end up being on production for the surrounding labor market. Ironically, policy considerations for continuing education (adult learners) are often shelved over concerns regarding the economy, although adult education has been shown to actually have a positive effect on the economy (Abendroth, 2014). This paradox will be explored further in this study.

Labor Driven Market. As higher education continues to evolve, the neoliberal shift in the community college mission is becoming increasingly important. In today's economy, there has been a shift towards jobs requiring a postsecondary degree – a focus to hire those with cognitive skills such as communication and analytics over physical skills associated with unskilled labor, such as manufacturing (Carnivale, Smith & Strohl, 2013; Green, et al., 2016; Deming, 2017). This means that those that are unemployed or looking for a better paying job are more likely to have to update their skills via postsecondary education. Without doing so, the chances of finding a position with a good salary are slim. Since the great recession of 2008, less than 4% of the created jobs did not require any postsecondary education (Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2016). Moreover, according to the Association of Colleges and Universities (2018), 82% of business executives and 75% of hiring managers say that completing a college education is absolutely essential or extremely important for obtaining employment. Therefore, it is almost guaranteed that someone will need to have some college education in order to get a job that pays well enough to provide for themselves and their families.

In order to meet the demand from the labor market, many community colleges have focused their efforts into becoming workforce development centers, "serving the needs of corporations and 'customers' at the expense of civic responsibility" (Boyd, 2011, 242). This can be seen through partnerships between corporations and community colleges, with corporations donating lab equipment - specific to their company - in exchange for internships tantamount to free labor, or corporations donating funds for programs to be taught using their specific methods, systematically reducing students to cogs in a machine (Boyd, 2011). While in the short-term, this may seem beneficial because students are able to start working for the company they have trained for, treating community colleges as workforce centers tends to leave students under or unprepared for their responsibilities - both social and financial - after finishing their education (Mollenkopf-Pigsley, 2015).

Despite the potential negative aspects of student workforce programs, Jacobs and Worth (2019) argue that if done correctly, student workforce programs in community colleges can actually have lasting beneficial effects on PT students. For example, community college workforce programs can tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of the students - not just the needs of the industry - and give students the cognitive skills they can utilize in their current professions as well as the students' future careers. Therefore, although industry shapes what programs are available at community colleges, the mission of the community colleges need to reflect the focus on the students they serve. This is one of the main reasons a major point of emphasis for the Obama Administration was the focus on the community college as workforce preparation hubs (Holland, 2015). The idea being that if students are able to afford an education, they can earn better wages, increasing their ability to break the cycle of generational poverty (Holland, 2015). The upside to a market-oriented system, though, is that the community colleges are in a position to receive a larger share of federal grants that can help pay for a large portion, if not all, of the educational expenses that post-traditional and other adult learners at community college have (Cox & Sallee, 2017). However, the major drawback to the

Obama Administration's focus on narrowing community college to become workplace preparation hubs further widened the distance between the current labor driven mission and the original civic engagement intent of higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Nonetheless, the federal administration was not the only reason that the overall community college mission drastically changed; the governance of community college also had a large impact on the shift in the mission.

Governance. Most community colleges prescribe to a traditional style of governance; headed up by a board of governors or trustees who make the decisions that affect the entire institution (Community College League of California [CCLC], 1998). The main responsibilities of the board are to, "[protect] the college so it can serve the public interest, [set] a clear and appropriate mission, [check] college performance, and [ensure] adequate support for the institution" (Davis, 2001, p. 1). However, just as the community college itself is extremely complex, so too would the governance be on how to accomplish those goals. Depending on the context, boards of governors or trustees can be locally elected while others are elected through the state or appointed by the governor (Association of Community College Trustees, n.d.; Schuetz, 2008). Bylaws of some institutions require that board members have specific backgrounds, while others may have no experience in the educational world whatsoever (Fletcher & Friedel, 2017; Education Commission of the States, 1997). Still, some boards are responsible for just the immediate institution, while others are responsible for making decisions for multiple institutions that make up a community college system (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems [NCHEMS], 2015). Even more, some institutions have the addition of "shared governance", where the faculty, staff, and sometimes even students, have a say in the policies and directions of the school (Eric Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges, 1984).

What type of governance a community college has is not the only complex aspect of governance. Decisions made often have unintended consequences and can sometimes create other, potentially bigger problems than before (Davis, 2001). A prime example is the CCCS having to create policies that are broad enough to apply to all schools within the system, but certain demographics within a particular school may make applying those policies difficult.

Institutional Factors Affecting Community College Student Success

Overall, the definition of what student success within the community college actually entails is somewhat of a controversial issue, as the overall mission of the community college is broad enough that success may look different depending on the situation, such as students taking classes of personal interest but not enrolling in a specific degree or certificate program. One definition of academic student success was offered by Bailey and colleagues. (2005), who define it as college students successfully completing a degree or certificate program within a timely manner (within 150% of the total time to completion for the degree or certificate). Accordingly, parents' income and education levels; demographic information such as gender, race or ethnicity; personal income levels, level of academic preparation, and previous enrollment behaviors - whether the students withdrew before completing a degree or certificate in the past - all contribute to whether a student will be successful in community college or not. The authors state that those factors cannot accurately predict outcomes for students as outcomes can be very different in two different community colleges that have similar populations (Bailey, et al., 2005). The authors found that institution size, higher overall enrollment rates from minoritized students at the college, higher overall percentage of part time students enrolled at the college, a larger percentage of part-time professors, and the state the college is located in can all have an effect on the success of individual students at the college.

Goldrick-Rab (2010) echoes the findings of Bailey and associates (2005). and makes suggestions for improving student success at the community college level and suggests reducing or eliminating remediation by creating credit bearing courses with a more individualized focus for students that need additional help. A study done by Jean-Francois Francisse (2013) showed a negative correlation between graduation rates and the number of remedial classes students took. Additionally, Goldrick-Rab (2010) advocates for increasing ethnic and racial heterogeneity in faculty and staff to support student success. Hurtado and DeAngelo (2012) identify a positive correlation in the outcomes of students in higher education and increased diversity among faculty and staff. Furthermore, Goldrick-Rab (2010) stresses more rigorous advising and structured pathways to ensure students only take courses they need. A study done by educational technology and research institution, EAB, showed that students that switch their major after the fifth term (roughly during Junior year), are far less likely to graduate within the 150% timeframe as compared to students that did not switch majors - effectively due to the amount of classes that are no longer relevant to their coursework (Stanley, 2014). Finally, to improve student success at the community college level, Goldrick-Rab (2010) suggests gearing financial aid awarding toward providing need-based financial aid rather than merit-based awards (2010). Gross et al. (2015) found that there was a large correlation between the amount of need-based aid provided and the successful outcomes - called departures in this study - of students.

TRiO Programs

One way the federal government has sought to address the issues of accessibility in college is through aid programs such as TRiO and Child Care Access Means Parents in School [CCAMPIS]. TRiO was first introduced through the Higher Education Act of 1968 but has since grown to include eight separate programs (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2019.). TRiO helps low-income, first generation, and students with a disability with college pathway selection, academic advice, career workshops, and counseling ("What Does TRiO Stand For?", n.d.). Studies have shown (Zeiser, et al., 2015; Chaney, et al., 1997) a higher completion rate and higher grade point averages among students accepted into and participate in the TRiO program compared to students in similar demographics that do not utilize TRiO services. Specifically, Zeiser, et al. (2015) shows an increase in persistence for students in community colleges that utilize TRiO services in rural, suburban, and urban areas at 83.3%, 89.3%, and 88.8% respectively for an average of 86% persistence rate - the national persistence rate for students in community college was only 62.3% for 2017 (National Student Clearing House Research Center [NSCHRC], 2019). This suggests that utilizing TRiO services drastically increases the likelihood for persistence and completion.

Research has uncovered downsides to the TRiO program as well. TRiO is considered a grant from the government, which means that funds can be limited, especially by geographic region. For example, in 2014 - the 50th anniversary of the TRiO program - the government funded over 100 TRiO programs in Texas, totaling more than

$40 million, while South Dakota only had 10 programs funded, totaling less than five million dollars (Department of Education, 2014). Therefore, there is no guarantee that students will be able to receive the help they need unless they happen to be enrolled at a campus that is funded by TRiO. Furthermore, at many college and universities, the TRiO program can only accept a very limited number of students per academic year, which means that many students are not able to receive services they could greatly benefit from. For example, Metropolitan State University of Denver can only enroll 200 students per academic year (Program Eligibility, n.d.) despite the fact that 19,794 students were enrolled at MSU for the 2019-2020 academic year, systematically making the percentage of students utilizing TRiO services at only slightly over one percent of the total student population (MSU Denver, 2020).

CCAMPIS Programs

Likewise, CCAMPIS - another national program - helps low-income parents attend college courses through campus-based childcare (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Institutions are not required to participate in the program; rather they must apply for the grant (US Department of Education, n.d.a.). At many colleges, students must be enrolled at least half time – or more - qualify for the federal Pell Grant, be enrolled in a certificate or degree program, and maintain at least a 2.0 GPA in order to be eligible for the CCAMPIS program, which pays up to 60% of the childcare costs (Iowa State University, n.d.; Utah State University, n.d.; Red Rocks Community College, n.d.).

The downside to enrollment in the CCAMPIS program, however, is that parents may have difficulty successfully meeting all the requirements while still working and taking care of a family. Furthermore, in order to utilize the CCAMPIS grant, caregivers must be state licensed and nationally accredited. This becomes challenging because many licensed caregivers charge well over $1000 a month per child. In fact, Colorado childcare is in the top 10 most expensive among the 50 states and Washington D.C., which means that the grants for childcare may not go as far or last as long (Roberts, 2019). For context, the average monthly salary for those with only a high school diploma was $2,006 as of 2014, making the cost of childcare roughly half the monthly budget, and more if the student has more than one child (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

Current Empirical Literature

Psychology of Poverty

Despite the - rather limited - programs aimed at helping students financially with programs such as TRiO and CCAMPIS, many students still struggle to balance paying for college and affording a living, creating a paradox. Although the student may know that obtaining a college education can help them afford a better living, they may lack the means to do so. According to Baum & Ma (2007), in the United States, life satisfaction is in part determined by personal income, which is ultimately determined by their level of education. Thus, more education means more income, which leads to greater life satisfaction. However, a study by Haushofer and Fehr (2014) found that poverty tends to cause negative emotional behaviors stemming from stress leading to imprudent and overly cautious decision making. This, in turn, causes repeating behaviors, creating a cycle of poverty that can be taught to children, and is frequently referred to as generational poverty (Haushofer & Fehr, 2014). This cognitive processing and resulting behaviors stemming from stress related to poverty is what I am referring to as poverty psychology.

Cycle of Poverty. Tyson argues that generational factors play a role in determining the ability of individuals to have upward mobility - socially and economically (2017). The Household Production Theory (Becker & Tomes, 1979) states that if parents have limited resources, the children tend not to do as well in school, translating to students not attending a postsecondary institution and repeating the cycle of their children also having a lack of upward mobility. Bluestone and Bennett (1982), and Chetty et al. (2016) contend that education is also the way to break the generational cycle of poverty thus reiterating Baum and Ma's research (2007). Pressler et al. additionally found that there was a positive correlation between parental educational – specifically the mother's education attainment level - achievement and ability to have upward mobility out of poverty. Students understand that education is important and want to break out of that cycle of poverty to be able to provide a better life for their family, so many students turn to community college believing that its affordability and flexibility will in fact make it easier to fit an education into their daily schedules.

Although numerous studies have focused on the correlation between the cycle of poverty and social mobility, other studies have submitted that a large cause of poverty is structural in nature - that is how and what the teachers are teaching the students. Jennifer Rogalsky (2009) argues that students tend to perform a certain way in school due to how the educational system has been set up. Many teachers, though they may be well intentioned, make decisions guided by erroneous stereotypes about the students and their families, the neighborhood, and even the city in which they live. Therefore, it is important to correct these false assumptions - such as urban parents tending to be illiterate or uninterested in helping their students learn - and in doing so, the students will begin to achieve higher levels than they previously may have (Payne, 2005; Cortese, 2007; Rogalsky, 2009).

While some may view this in stark contrast to the idea of the cycle of poverty, I believe the two are actually interrelated. Compton-Lily (2004) suggests that many parents simply lack the monetary and time resources to be able to adequately help their children. Therefore, although there may be a generational component to a student's educational attainment level, there are other ways that students can be guided along to help them achieve upward mobility.

Research Methodologies for Community College Effectiveness

Despite the transition to a labor driven mission in the community college system - in hopes to alleviate economic issues, such as generational poverty, there is no standard of research methodologies to test community college effectiveness on student outcomes (Seidman, 1993). Almost 30 years after Seidman's article was published, this is still the case. Up until 2017, the data set collected by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) for community college students was first- time full-time and part-time students and whether a student received a degree or certificate within three years (IPEDS, 2019). However, as previously discussed, those outcomes do not accurately reflect the demographics of community college students. Therefore, IPEDS finally updated their data collection system to include new cohorts for community college data collection to include data on first-time, part time students; non-first time full-time, students; and non-first time part-time students as well as whether a student received a degree or certificate within six or eight years (IPEDS, 2019). Still, these measurements do not go far enough to accurately reflect the actuality of community college students' lives. Therefore, a more comprehensive outcome measure should be used to better reflect the community college population. As such, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) created the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) which takes into account transfer data for students completing a degree, as well as sub-populations not collected by IPEDS, data on developmental education, career and technical information, etc. (VFA, n.d.). Because there is currently little comprehensive data for community college outcomes, this study will help to serve as a guide to gain a more complete understanding of students at CC.

Colorado Community College System

Most of the third party literature regarding the CCCS pertains to dual credit (concurrent enrollment) between the CCCS and Colorado high schools (Gertge, 2008; Jorgenson, 2013), policies for remedial education (Khudododov, et al., 2016; McHenry, & Flora, 2017), pathway programs (Rath, et al., 2013; WICHE, 2017; Carnivale et al. 2017), faculty satisfaction and turnover (Cashwell, 2009; Mumme, 2018), and leadership (administration) succession (Binard-Carlson, 2007). However, not much research has been done on the CCCS policies in regard to the economic instability of existing college students, which will be highlighted through this study.

Summary

Many studies have focused on different aspects of economic instability, such as housing and food insecurity. From these studies, we know that over 14% of community college students claim to be homeless, as reported by federal aid assistance applications (Cohen, 2019). We also know that many students struggle with being able to afford college and afford a living simultaneously - a fact which is only emphasized for PT students, as 51% of students with dependents enroll in community college (PNPI, 2018). This puts many students in a dilemma, because today's employment landscape essentially requires a postsecondary education, so many students have to return to college in order to get a good paying job that can support themselves and their families, but they have difficulty to afford the college they need to be able to support themselves and their families.

Despite a large portion of the population being made up of PT students, there is a shortage of policies within the community college system for these students (Bronton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018) - which is the case with the CCCS. However, the community college is a very diverse institution with many different demographics of students. Therefore, it cannot be as simple as making blanket policies that can equitably apply to all students within the community college system. This is why utilizing the multiple frameworks to be able to study the population is appropriate; specifically, the theoretical framework allows for the study of the community college students from multiple angles in order to determine the most applicable way to create policies to better help PT students experiencing economic instability. This next section lays out the rationale and methods used to conduct this study to understand the topic in further detail.

Chapter 3: Methods

As of 2019, community college students make up 41% of all U.S. undergraduates, and of those, over half must receive aid in order to be able to afford college (Phillippe & Tekle, 2019). Additionally, 62% of full-time community college students and 72% of part time students are employed while attending college (Phillippe & Tekle, 2019). According to a 2014 National Student Engagement Survey, college students- both community college and traditional - tend to study an average of 17 hours per week in addition to classroom hours (Pierre, Kathy, 2014).This can cause an issue when students with children and/or jobs have to incorporate study time into their already busy schedules. The potential lack of resources for students - both financial and time - and the resulting stresses can affect a student's mental and physical well-being, which can in turn affect the students' ability to be successful in the classroom (DeCarlo-Santiago, et al., 2011).

Economic instability only amplifies the difficulties with being successful in the classroom. Therefore, this study was guided by these questions:

RQ1: What Colorado Community College System (CCCS) policies are in place that affect Post-Traditional students and students facing economic instability?

a. What is the focus - academic or financial - of these policies?

RQ2: How did one community college within the system implement those policies across campus, within individual departments, and in the classroom?

RQ3: How does the implementation of policies at the individual college level affect the ability of Post-Traditional students and students dealing with economic instability to be successful within the classroom?

Paradigm

The community college is very diverse, with many different demographics of students, thus it is important to view this study through a pragmatic paradigm. A pragmatic paradigm relies on multiple viewpoints and focuses on a particular problem and how those different viewpoints attempt to solve the issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Originated by Charles Sanders Pieirce - referred to as the Father of Pragmatism - pragmatic research tends to be focused on the answers, or truth, as it works at the time of data collection; overall truth may change depending on the circumstances (Houser & Kloesel, 1992), such as altering the implementation of a policy based on the current student population of a school, which may differ from one school to the next. Additionally, pragmatists realize that research takes place within the context of other disciplines, such as historical or social contexts (Houser & Kloesel, 1998); as the population of students at a community college is often vastly diverse, research must be approached from multiple contexts in order for the research to better represent the needs of that particular population (Martin, 2005). For these reasons, I chose this approach of pragmatism to study the community college.

Colorado Community College System

The Colorado Community College System (CCCS) is governed by a state board of 11 members, nine of which are appointed by the governor (CCCS, n.d.). The board is responsible for all the operating procedures for the CCCS. The System Chancellor - also selected by the board - is responsible for the guidelines for the colleges' interpretation of those board policies. It is then up to the individual campus to implement the policies based on the guidelines from the Chancellor (CCCS, n.d.a.). In practice, most policies have a system policy and a board policy. The system policy is very ambiguous - often only one sentence - referring to the subsequent board policy, which then explains in greater detail the outline of the policy.

Once the system policies - authorized by the system board - have been set, the individual colleges within the system then create organizational guidelines through which the college procedures are developed (Personal Communication, [Name withheld] April 25th 2021). However, the Board policies, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, are extremely vague by design. Additionally, the language tends to be very jargon oriented and difficult to understand. Therefore, it is possible for one college within the system to completely interpret a particular board policy completely differently; as such, the resulting implementation can be completely different depending on how the individual college interpreted the language in the system policy.

Community College Used for Study

I chose this specific community college (CC) for the study because this college has multiple campuses. In order to be able to most easily apply the findings and recommendations to other colleges within the system, it was important to study a community college with a diverse array of demographics. With multiple campuses located in different areas of the state of Colorado, this was able to be accomplished (Personal Communication, [Name Withheld], April 15,2021). CC is unique in that it functions almost like a system within a system; the president and presidential cabinet oversees the college as a whole, but each campus functions autonomously (Personal communication, [Name withheld], March 29, 2021). Each campus has its own Advising Department, and the faculty is focused campus wide. While there are certain departments that do function college wide, such as Financial Aid and the Registrar's Office, there are separate offices at different institutions. Because each of the campuses are able to function autonomously, this would be similar to studying three separate colleges. Therefore, any similar themes found between the different campuses would have a greater likelihood of also being similar at other institutions within the CCCS.

As of the 2019-2020 academic year, there were 29,026 enrolled at CC, with students from 48 states and D.C. and 101 countries (Personal communication, [Name Withheld], April 15, 2021). Additionally, 34% of all students are students of color - with 1% of students identifying as Native American or Alaskan, 4% Asian, 2% Black or African American, 23% Hispanic/Latino, and 4% identifying as having two or more races (personal communication, [Name withheld], April 15, 2021) Furthermore, the median age of students starting college is 23, and over 74% of all students attend part time (personal communication, [Name withheld], April 15, 2021). The student population at CC is very diverse and requires a pragmatic lens to be able to more fully obtain all the necessary information for the study.

Resources Available to Students. The CC does offer a few resources to help students that are struggling economically. First, each campus has its own food bank that collect food through donations as well as receive weekly allotments from the Food Bank of the Rockies (Personal Communication, [name withheld], July 17, 2021). Additionally, the CC does take part in the both the TRiO program that can help to provide some students with additional support as well as the CCAMPIS program that works with local childcare agencies. These resources are usually mentioned in the syllabi for classes as well through college wide messaging to students such as newsletters or emails.

Conceptual Framework

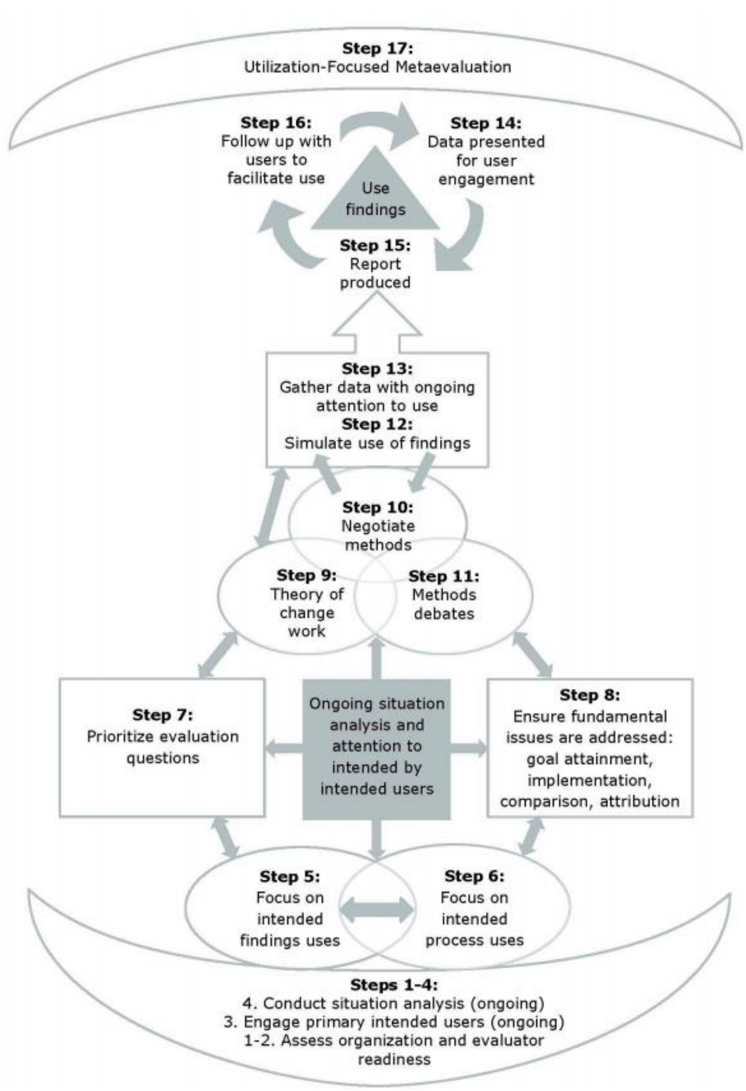
The vast diversity of CC is the reasoning behind using multiple frameworks in this study - it is important to view the research from different angles in order to gain the clearest picture of the community college, given the community college is very diverse. As the literature review discussed, many community colleges have narrowed their missions to focus on regional workforce development, a phenomenon explained by neoliberal theory. This is due to the majority of well-paying jobs in the United States requiring some form of post-secondary education, so community colleges must narrow their mission in order to meet the immediate needs of their students. The conceptual framework combines the theory of motivation with the principal-agent theory; the governing body - either the CCCS or the individual colleges - must create broad policies that can apply to most students, but it is up to the agent - either the individual colleges or the individual departments within the college - to interpret and implement those policies depending on the needs of their particular students, who can vary as a result of different motivating factors. As a result of multiple frameworks, it was important to utilize a research methodology that would complement the pragmatic nature.

Program Evaluation Model

Developed by Michael Patton (2008), the Utilization Focused Method (UFE) allows the evaluator to create a partnership with the intended users of the evaluation. According to Patton, users are more likely to use an evaluation if they feel a sense of ownership and can be actively involved in creating the evaluation. Because the goal of UFE is for the evaluation to actually be useful to the end users, it is important to engage them at every level of the evaluation process, from the initial evaluation creation through the implementation (Alkin & Christie, 2004). In fact, the UFE is not specific to any "particular evaluation content, model, method, theory, or even use" (Patton, 2008, p. 5) - only that it is designed to be created alongside the end users for the evaluation and results to be useful to them.

In order for the evaluator to keep the end users in mind, Patton developed a 17 step guide to the evaluation process, which can be seen in Figure 3. However, these steps are not rigid and can be completed non-sequentially, as its practicality is meant to meet the needs of the end users (Patton, 2008). The fact that the steps could be completed non-sequentially was beneficial for the completion of this study, as many of the research questions, literature review, conceptual frameworks, and methodologies were already pre-planned as a result of the Dissertation in Practice (DIP) Research Proposal. Therefore, I had already completed steps nine and ten. Step nine in the UFE process is to determine the intervention model - that is the theory used for framing the evaluation. I am using the conceptual framework of motivation set within the context of neoliberal theory for this study. Step 10 is to negotiate the methods for obtaining the findings that can be utilized by the end user. As will be further discussed in this chapter in the limitations section, I was unable to obtain specific information to disaggregate the student population to focus on PT students; therefore, the method for obtaining the information had to be through interviewing individuals in multiple departments in order to understand their interactions with certain demographics of students and how their departments implemented policies from the CCCS.

Figure 3.
Utilization Focused Evaluation 17 Step Guide



Although these steps had been preplanned, it was critical to get support for the methodologies and conceptual frameworks before proceeding, as the entire point of the UFE is to keep the end users in mind. I met with a high-level administrator that agreed to be the Person Of Contact (POC) for the UFE model. They agreed the steps met the needs of the evaluation. During the initial meeting between myself and POC, I went over my research questions for the study, the conceptual frameworks I would be using, and we discussed the research goals and interview approach at length to determine the individuals she thought would be the best to give the information necessary to ensure the recommendations could be used by the college.

Additionally, during this meeting, I completed steps 11 and 12 in the UFE process. Step 11 is to ensure that the end user understands the implications of using the interviews as a method for obtaining the information (Patton, 2008). I completed step 11 by discussing my inability to obtain individual student records, and POC agreed that interviews would be the best way to obtain the information - but it was important to differentiate between the campuses and college wide departments to fully reach saturation with the information. Therefore, the POC suggested that I interview multiple people from each campus as well as several that are considered employed college wide. Step 12 in the UTE process is to run a practice evaluation to ensure a smooth evaluation (Patton, 2008); this was accomplished by discussing the questions that I intended to ask the individuals and to get feedback on what questions needed to change or be added to ensure that the resulting information was optimized for use by the end user.

Evaluation Design

According Roger Boothroyd at the University of South Florida (2018), there are three main types of evaluations: formative, summative, and process-based. Formative evaluations focus on the program prior to implementation to ensure that the program will be feasible and work as intended (Reichardt, C.S., 1994). Summative evaluations focus on assessing the impact or outcome that a program had once the process has been completed (Scriven, 1967) Process-based evaluations focus on the design and overall efficiency of the program "to examine how it develops its structures and its programs in order to attain the outcomes everyone wants it to achieve" (Boothroyd, 2018, p. 9). Unfortunately, as will be discussed later on in this chapter, the outcome measure data - that is the percentage of students that received a degree or certificate or enrolled in another institution - reported by the Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS) is from the 2011-2012 academic year, which means that the data does not accurately reflect the current collegiate environment. As such, it would not be appropriate to use a summative evaluation, nor would a formative evaluation be appropriate as the focus of the study is on a currently functioning system. Therefore, working collaboratively with POC, we ended up with selecting a case study for a process-based evaluation. For the case study, it was important to interview many individuals within the college regarding policy implementation on PT students experiencing economic instability to determine how efficient the college is being with those implementations, rather than on development of a program or focusing on the outcomes - due to lack of available data (Stufflebeam & Shinkfeld, 2007).

A program-based evaluation works will with the conceptual framework of motivation, as the focus of the policy implementation -both in the CCCS to the schools within the system, and to the departments within CC - is to help the student population succeed, and reviewing the common themes discussed in the interviews for gaps in current implementation would allow myself and the end user, CC, to know whether or not those policy implementations were successful or if they needed adjustments. Furthermore, with regards to the conceptual framework of motivation, while Deshield, et al. (2005) suggested a positive correlation between a student's motivation and student success rates, the inverse could also be true; a decrease in student success could also indicate a decrease in student motivational factors.

Rationale for Departmental Selection

Because the focus of the study is college wide, which encompasses both the academic and financial realms, it was important to target departments that have a direct effect on the student population. Using the conceptual framework of motivation and principal-agent theory, the most important department to target was the College Administration, as they are the department that interprets the policies set forth by the CCCS and makes overarching policy implementation that affect the student body as a whole (Sandoval-Lucero, E., personal communication, May 16, 2019). Secondly, financial aid is an important aspect for students struggling with economic insecurity; if a student is struggling to pay their bills, has housing or food insecurity, has lost their job, etc., it stands to reason that the students may have trouble paying for their college classes, so interviewing the Financial Aid department is imperative. In the academic realm, it would also be important to speak with both the faculty and the Advising department, as students suffering from economic instability may have difficulty focusing on the schoolwork, as the conceptual framework suggests. Therefore, it is important to see how the faculty and Advising Department are working with these students to help them be successful in classes despite their current circumstances.

Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Questions Creation. Steps seven and eight in the UFE process focus on creating the questions for the evaluation. As I had already created several research questions that guided the study in general, that was a good place to start. Specifically, the research questions two and three pertained to the creation of the evaluation for the study; research question one focused on the CCCS and would be used in the recommendations section later in the study. The two overarching questions were:

1. How is the Community College implementing CCCS policies that affect PT students and students dealing with economic instability as a whole, within individual departments, and in classrooms?

   2. How does the implementation of policies at the individual college level on the ability of Post-Traditional students and students dealing with economic instability to be successful within the classroom?

However, we also needed to keep in mind the questions that the program-based evaluation seeks to answer. Therefore, the questions were tailored to each department, from Administration, Financial Aid, Advising, and Faculty.

Although there were some questions that were similar for every department - such as asking how their department identified students dealing with economic instability - in order to determine which questions to specifically ask each department, it was important to reflect on the type of interactions the departments had with students. Then, I created the specific questions related to the system policies that I had identified earlier that related to that department. For example, the questions for the financial aid office focused on the monetary aspect of students, such as:

1. Concerning the system policy for financial aid professional judgement, how does the professional judgement process work at the Community College for reducing EFC (Expected Family Contribution)/ increasing aid?

2. If a student doesn't have enough of a chance in EFC to be eligible for additional aid but is still struggling financially, what resources does your office provide or direct the student to?
3. Concerning the system policy for Satisfactory Academic Progress, what is the process for appealing?
    a. What is the criteria for approval?
    b. What is the likelihood for approval?
    c. What does professional judgement look like in the Satisfactory Academic Progress process?
4. What does the EFC chart look like for CSG at the Community College?
    a. What is the maximum per year? Is it prorated for enrollment?
    b. Is there discretion in awarding additional CSG, or is it conditional to EFC?

Likewise, the Faculty questions focused on the system policies related to academics, coursework, and college readiness.

1. Concerning the system policy on academic standards and practices for grading in the classroom, what does this look like at the Community College?
2. Are faculty members allowed to use professional judgement when grading, or is there a set system? If there is a system for grading, what does that system look like?
3. Concerning the system policy for the assessment of college readiness, what does remediation and developmental education look like at the Community College?

4. The system policy does not allow developmental education courses to be used for financial aid. How would changing policy to allow for credit while in developmental education/remedial courses - thus being eligible for financial aid- change your teaching practices in the classroom?

The full list of questions can be viewed in Appendices A-D.

Data Collection

CCCS Policies on Economic Instability

As the study sought to understand how CC implemented policies from the CCCS, it was important to examine the CCCS policies to determine what, if any, policies related to economic instability. Reviewing these policies, in turn, would help to determine what questions to ask each department. Therefore, I reviewed each of the CCCS policies listed on their website and compiled a list of policies and guidelines pertaining to PT students and students dealing with economic instability.

Content Analysis. In order to determine what system policies applied to PT students and students experiencing economic instability, I utilized a content analysis developed by Olavi "Ole" Holsti (1969). This content analysis method is used to differentiate and sort materials in a given data set based on specific keywords, concepts or characteristics (Holsti, 1969). Because my definitions of economic instability and post-traditional students would likely not appear in the language in the policies, I focused on themes rather than on specific wording or phrases.

To start, I coded the policies into two categories: policies that dealt directly with students, and policies that did not, such as hiring practices for faculty members or government reporting on safety measures. Then, I further coded the remaining policies that dealt directly with students by taking into account the definitions for these two populations of students - that is, looking for the characteristics of policies that could directly affect PT students and students dealing with economic instability - and separated these remaining policies that dealt directly with students into three additional categories. The first category was those policies that could apply to any student but not specifically affect the ability of PT students or students dealing with economic instability to be successful in their classrooms, such as the system policy dictating funding for the State Student Advisory Council. The second category was those system policies that loosely affected these two populations of students, such as the system policy on application and enrollment, as students need to be accepted and enrolled in order to be considered a student. The third, and most important category was those policies that directly affected PT students and students dealing with economic instability. For example, the charging of fees and scholarships - whereas a student dealing with economic instability may have a difficult time paying for the classes or fees assessed by the school - would be a policy that can directly affect PT students and students dealing with economic instability.

One downside to content analysis is that it can be extremely time consuming (Holsti, 1969). Reviewing these policies to determine whether they applied or not was no exception, as I had to review each of the policies that govern the CCCS system. In all, there are currently 196 separate policies that govern the CCCS. However, the system policies are already broken out into nine separate categories: Organization, college personnel, students, cyber security, internal audit, fiscal, educational programs, buildings and grounds, and safety, security, and civil rights (Policies and Procedures, 2021.).

Therefore, I reviewed each of the policies within each of the system categories to determine which policies could be applied, even loosely, to PT students and students dealing with economic instability.

Of the categories listed by CCCS, only the categories of Students, Educational Programs, and Safety, Security, and Civil Rights deal directly with students; the remaining categories govern the organizational makeup of the board and governing councils, employment regulations, fiscal management of the CCCS resources from an employment perspective, and buildings and grounds. Of the policies that deal directly with students - 78 in total - very few of them are related to PT students or economic instability. In fact, the only two system categories that deal directly or indirectly with PT students or students dealing with economic instability are the Students and Educational Programs. Out of the remaining policies in these two categories that apply directly to students, only 15 policies apply directly to PT students or students dealing with economic instability, while another nine could loosely be applied to this demographic.

However, while further reflecting on the language of these policies through the lens of the conceptual framework, motivational theory, there were a few policies that I felt did not fully encompass the information that I was seeking for this study. For example, although Board Policy (BP) 4-41 is about grants, which can affect students dealing with economic instability, the focus of the policy is on grants for underrepresented populations, with an emphasis on diversity. Therefore, I did not use all identified policies to create questions for the interviews. The policies that did inform my questions for the study can be found in table 1.

Table 1.
CCCS Policies and Procedures

Policy Section	*Policy Number*	*Brief Description*	*What Department Policy Applies To*
Students	BP 4-20 Student Tuition and Fees/Scholarships	Defines the types of fees asses to students, scholarship categories, and overall tuition requirements	Administration
	SP 4-20b Financial Aid Professional Judgement	Allows for professional judgement to make financial aid decisions for change of income or household information	Financial Aid
	SP 4-20c Return of Title IV Funds	Describes the process for returning funds to the government if a student that is receiving financial aid is not successful in their classes	Financial Aid
	SP 4-20d Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) for Financial Aid	Defines the general process for SAP to regain eligibility for receiving financial aid	Financial Aid
	BP 4-23; SP 4-23 College Opportunity Fund	Defines the criteria and process for awarding a per credit grant to in state students	Financial Aid

	SP 4-24 Colorado Student Grant (CSG) Awarding Procedure	Defines the guidelines for awarding the CSG to in state students	Financial Aid
Educational Programs	SP 9-41 Assessment for College Readiness	Focuses on remediation courses and developmental education	Faculty
	BP 9-43 Certification of Workplace Literacy Programs	Allows for development of workplace literacy programs with partnering businesses	Administration
	SP 9-20a Service Area Principles and Guidelines	Directs colleges to develop positive relationships with constituents in their immediate service area	Administration
	BP 9-42; SP 9-42 Prior Learning Assessment Credit	Allows colleges to provide college credit for previous learning	Advising
	BP 9-72; SP 9-72 Transfer of Post-Secondary Credits from Area Technical Colleges to Community Colleges	Focuses on transfer credits from area technical colleges to the individual colleges	Advising
	BP 9-80; SP 9-80a Academic Standards and Practices	Establishes shared practices related to grading and academic standing	Faculty

CC Policy Implementation

Step 13 in the UFE process is to gather data with ongoing attention to use by the intended users. Therefore, I collected interviews as the main pieces of data from individuals within each department as well as artifacts from different departments, such as documents and forms. Although I mainly focused on data collection that specifically focused on the research questions, I also made sure to notate any data relevant to the users - either the individuals within the department, the department as a whole, or CC as a whole - to ensure that they were able to receive the most use out of the information at hand, as per the UFE model. An example of this with the creation and implementation of the Single Stop Project, which will be discussed further in chapter 5. However, a brief overview is that the Single Stop Project is a database that houses current extra-curricular resources, such as housing and food benefits, and then has a single point person that can contact the student to give them the necessary resources. In speaking with the participant in charge of the Single Stop Project, I advised that many other participants felt that they were not able to adequately help the students they interacted with and suggested that instead of having only one person having access to the resources, to allow multiple student facing employees have access to these resources to be able to give to the students, and then the point person for the Single Stop Project could follow up with the students to ensure they were being completed. The participant did not know that others felt this way would take the suggestion into consideration.

Interviews

Interview data were collected using semi-structured interviews. According to

Michael Patton (2014), semi-structured interviews are loosely structured using a particular topic as a guide. Therefore, the interviewer may have some general questions; however, the topic guides the conversation to ensure saturation of that data - that is, that we have covered as much of that particular topic before moving onto the next topic. For example, the topic of conversation regarded academic freedom and whether or not CC had a set system of grading or if the faculty could use professional judgement when grading. The follow up questions were on the faculty member's personal preference as to whether norming of grading policies or academic freedom was more important and why.

Additionally, regarding the interviews, building rapport and trust with participants is also important to limit the participant being uncomfortable, thus not being forthcoming with their information (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, to begin the interview, it was also important for me to tell them about myself, and that I, too work in higher education in addition to telling them why I am completing this study - reiterating some of what was already stated in the initial participant selection email. Although I had specific questions, if a follow up that was pertinent to the discussion came up, we discussed the information. This was the main source for information as to how the college and the individual departments worked with the student body in general as well as with PT students and students dealing with economic instability.

Bias Avoidance. Because I have worked in higher education for almost a decade, so I am fairly familiar with many of the issues plaguing higher education. Therefore, in order to limit bias with the interview questions, it was paramount to lean on the UFE method to create questions in line with what the POC and CC wanted to gain a better understanding of as well as to ask open ended questions to gain an understanding of the participants point of view rather than to ask a leading question to guide the question to my preconceived notions of the answers the participants may give.

Interview Participants. According to the POC, CC is unique in that it has certain departments that are focused college wide, such as the Financial Aid and Registrar Offices. However, there are other departments that are campus based, meaning that each of the four campuses are responsible for their own departments. Academic Advising and Faculty fall into this category. Therefore, in order to obtain a holistic view of how CC implements policies, it would be important to interview individuals from the college wide departments as well as the campus-based departments, in addition to upper administration for the college. Interviews included five individuals from upper administration, five from Financial Aid, four from Advising, and four from the faculty for a total of 18 interviews (Table 2).

Table 2.
Interview Counts by Interviewee Group

Interviewee Group	Total Number of Interviews
Administration	5
Financial Aid	5
Advising	4
Faculty	4
Total Interviews	18

As an extension of the principal- agent problem notated in the conceptual framework, each campus functions as its own entity. Therefore, While the college as a whole interprets and implements policies from the CCCS by creating standard operating procedures college wide, each campus interprets and implements those operating procedures based on the demographics for their particular campus (personal communication, [Name withheld], April 2, 2021). Therefore, it was important to interview college wide administrators and campus wide administrators. For administration, I interviewed the President of CC, the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), the Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Success, and two campus Vice Presidents; although there are three campuses, the current Vice President position for the one campus is vacant. For the college wide departments, I interviewed the Director of Financial Aid as well as four other employees in the Financial Aid Office. For the campus-based departments, I interviewed the director of advising for each of the three campuses and online, four in total. Likewise, for the faculty, it was important to see how different departments handled working with PT students and students dealing with economic instability, so I interviewed one faculty member from the Career and Technical Education (CTE), one from the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) department, and two from the liberal arts department.

Interview Format. I conducted all the interviews via video conferencing due to the COVID pandemic, as most employees were still working from home. This allowed the interview to be recorded fairly easily, with just the push of a button. Each interview consisted of between 14 and 16 scripted questions for each department; however, the interview was only semi-scripted, in that if a participant was talking about a particular issue, we explored the issue until the participant felt the answer was satisfactory. The interviews were scheduled for 30 minutes, but it was possible for the interview to go longer than the allotted time, should the participant have more to say; the majority of the interviews ended up taking around an hour each to fully explore the topics.

Although I worked with POC to determine the individuals that should be interviewed and she initially reached out to the participants to ensure they knew about the study, I sent out the invitations to participate in the study via email. We coordinated a time that would work the best for their schedule and then sent them a meeting via a video conferencing application as well as a copy of the questions so that they could think of answers beforehand. I also advised them to gather any forms, documents, and any other artifacts that they thought may be pertinent to give the holistic picture for helping the students in their department. In order to keep in line with the UFE, I also asked them to determine if there was anything else that they thought was pertinent to the study, such as resources they know about and routinely advise students on.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were concluded, each interview was transcribed and the original video recording deleted, as described in the consent form. Using a thematic inductive analysis method (Fereday, & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) to analyze the data from the documentation and interview, as there were no set themes, I coded the data and was able to find commonalities between the data from individuals within the same department and group them into themes based on those commonalities (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). These themes included issues with communication between departments, issues with written communication, issues with communication to students, fiscal restraints with regard to hiring enough employees to adequately address student needs, and the lack of available resources to address student needs.

Additionally, the conceptual framework of motivation was used in creation of these themes, keeping in mind Maslow's hierarchy and how the students' motivation affected their interactions with the individual departments. As a result of the thematic analysis, I was able to compare and contrast the answers between the individual departments and the administration to see if there were any liberties taken with the departmental interpretation and implementation between the principal - in this case CC - and the agent, the individual department. These findings will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Triangulation

Triangulation is about finding confirmatory evidence in multiple data sources as indicated by the artifacts, but triangulation is also about bringing nuance and texture to the findings (Creswell, 1994). According to the Creswell, there are four different types of triangulation: data triangulation - used in this study to confirm data through multiple data sources, in this case multiple participants throughout the college; theory triangulation, used in this study by utilizing the multiple theories to create the conceptual framework of motivation due to the pragmatic nature of the community college; methods triangulation, used in this study by utilizing both the UFE and Holsti's content analysis methodology to examine different aspects of this study; and investigator triangulation - which although not used in this study, the use of the UFE model in order to have multiple individuals examine and use the data, accomplishes a similar goal.

One validation method for the qualitative data lies in the idea of triangulation, first introduced by Campbell and Fiske (1959). Gathering information from multiple sources about one topic ensures reliability by finding common themes to confirm the findings. For example, miscommunication between departments has led to a lack of understanding about what specifically each department does in relation to their own department, and how intertwined the student experience is with multiple departments. This has resulted in frustrations from one department toward another department, yet those in the other department like mindedly believe that the first department does not adequately help students. Another commonality found between multiple departments was the Student of Concern form, where every participant touted the form for addressing needs with economic instability, but many participants from multiple departments have stated that they believe the form is ineffective and that students are not readily being given the necessary resources to be successful. Additionally, every participant noted a lack of fiscal resources to be able to hire enough employees and/or provide enough services to adequately serve student needs to help them to continue to be successful in their classes.

Artifact Analysis

As these interviews were conducted via video conferencing, I asked that the artifacts that the individuals procured be sent to me via email. These artifacts included assignments focusing on developing a growth mindset vs. having a fixed mindset from faculty, used to help students change their mindset to persevere regardless of circumstances; scholarship information and applications from the financial aid office, used to help students find additional funding when they no longer have Title IV aid available; and community resources, prior learning assessment information, and student of concern form from the advising office, used to help students navigate systems by providing resources to aid them in their collegiate journey. Another aspect of Holsi's content analysis methodology focused on revealing patterns in communication content (1969). Therefore, I used each of the artifacts to find consistent patterns in the information, as the given artifacts were mentioned by multiple participants in each department, such as the scholarships mentioned by financial aid as a resource for students that could not receive additional funding. Additionally, some artifacts - such as the student of concern form - were actually mentioned by every participant, regardless of their affiliation to the college.

In addition to finding the themes within and between departments, the artifacts were also used to further solidify the information given. For example, when asked about how their department - or the college as a whole in the case of administration - had any alerts in place to help identify students dealing with economic instability in order to provide them resources, every participant in the study said that there were no formal alerts in place, but they did have a student of concern form that they could fill out if they suspected or the student disclosed issues with economic instability, which would then be sent to a different department to hopefully provide the students with resources for their given need. The artifacts collected were then analyzed and used to affirm the themes found from the departmental interviews. Additionally, the artifacts served to support the information from the interviews. This process also contributed to triangulation, by confirming the homogeneity of the information between the artifacts and the interviews. The artifacts allowed me to gain a better understanding of the relationship between the departments and students; how do the forms look, are they able to read or are they full of jargon, do the forms set proper expectations for where to send the forms or how long the form will take to be processed, etc.

Researcher Positionality and Role of the Researcher

For this study, it is important to note my positionality. I am a financial aid professional that has worked in higher education for nearly eight years, and my passion for PT students emerged while working as a financial aid and academic counselor at Ashford University. I was moved by the struggle that many were going through, but at the same time in awe of how much effort it took to be successful in school while trying to juggle so many other responsibilities.

In many ways, I sympathized with the students because I myself was a PT student. I originally went to a community college. At the time, a four-year university was too expensive, even with financial aid, so the only way I could afford to go to college and take care of my living expenses. In fact, I had to work three jobs to be able to afford the tuition and bills -even with financial aid. It was very difficult to be successful in classes while working so many hours outside of class. I would get off work - where I worked an overnight shift - and drive over to the campus parking lot to sleep in my car for an hour before class began.

Working three jobs is part of what led me to garner an interest in the idea of economic instability, and ultimately the conceptual framework of motivation. Without any one of the jobs, I could not afford to pay my bills, much less pay for college. When I was let go from my largest paying job, it was extremely difficult to focus on trying to keep my apartment, pay the bills, look for a job, and focus on schoolwork. However, I knew that it was important to earn a degree in order to be able to bring myself out of the situation I was in, which led me to being successful in my college classes.

Therefore, my biases are in line with the outcome of the study. The lens in which I view this study guided the creation of the research questions of determining what policies the CCCS has in place to help PT students and students dealing with economic instability, how CC is implementing these policies - both on at the institutional and department levels, and determining how these policy implementations affect the ability of PT students and students dealing with economic instability to be successful in classes. Through answering these questions, I will be able to make recommendations to better help this demographic of students.

Reliability

In order to limit researcher bias, I made sure to conduct frequent validation checks throughout the process (Cresswell, 2012). This included utilizing the UFE model to have multiple viewpoints in writing the questions rather than writing them myself, as well as having the participants read the transcript of the interview to provide any clarification or elaboration. After I transcribed each interview, I emailed the transcript to them and asked each of the participants to read through the interview. Most determined that the interviews dictated exactly what they were conveying, but a few, such as a faculty member wanted to expand on their grading system. They had said in the interview that they tended to be less rigorous with due dates in some areas and more rigorous in another. However, due to the semi-structured interview format, the additional questions I asked moved the conversation in a different direction, and the participant realized they had only spoken about the areas where they were less rigorous and then elaborated on the areas of their teaching where they were more rigorous.

Limitations

As with any study, this evaluation had limitations. One limitation that I faced in the study was that I was unable to access specific quantitative data and am working with perceptions of staff members rather than seeing the data on student outcomes. However, I addressed this limitation through the set-up of the study. Although I was working with the perceptions of staff members, I made sure to speak with multiple staff members in multiple departments in order to ensure the information I received was triangulated, thus more reliable.

A second limitation related to the first limitation is the IPEDs metrics used to measure outcomes for students. While the government requires community colleges to report this data for certain programs like TRiO, according to the Director of TRiO Support Services at CC (personal communication, [Name withheld] April 15, 2021), this data is not readily available on IPEDs website. Additionally, the data that is currently available is from the 2011-2012 year, so the data does not accurately reflect the current diverse population at the community college level. However, a database called the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) does take into account outcomes and success data specific to the community college demographics (Ashford, 2017). The VFA's metrics take into account that many community college students work full time, have been out of school for long periods of time, and are possibly pursuing education for needs other than receiving a degree -such as professional development, individual certifications, etc. (Phillippe, 2019). These metrics include developmental progress measures, one year progress, two year progress, six year outcome measures, and career and technical education measures, as well as key performance indicators such as how long it takes students to earn 6, 12, 15, etc. credits (VFA, n.d.). The issue; however, is that this reporting is strictly voluntary, and CC does not participate in the VFA program. A recommendation to join the VFA will be discussed further in this study.

Another limitation is that not every school within the CCCS is the same. Therefore, any recommendations made from the findings at a particular school may or may not work at a different school. However, the reason for focusing on community colleges is that they provide a diverse population regardless of location. Therefore, the recommendations given may be applied to similar populations at different schools within the CCCS.

Additionally, another limitation was that I was focusing specifically on PT students; not all PT students deal with economic instability, and not all students that deal with economic instability are PT students. The ultimate goal of this UFE study is to be able to make recommendations that will positively affect the ability for PT students experiencing economic instability to be successful in classes despite their current circumstances. Therefore, any resulting changes to policies, procedures, or addition of resources from this study will benefit all students in addition to PT students and students dealing with economic instability.

Summary

This study was guided by these questions:

RQ1: What Colorado Community College System (CCCS) policies are in place that affect Post-Traditional students and students facing economic instability?

a. What is the focus - academic or financial - of these policies?

RQ2: How did one community college within the system implement those policies across campus, within individual departments, and in the classroom?

RQ3: How does the implementation of policies at the individual college level affect the ability of Post-Traditional students and students dealing with economic instability to be successful within the classroom?

Using a Utilization Focused Evaluation method, I worked with Dr. POC to develop questions to interview employees in the Financial Aid, Advising, Faculty and College Administration Departments. The evaluation determined how each department worked with PT students and students dealing with economic instability and was designed for both the college as a whole and the individual departments to be able to utilize the results and recommendations in order to better support these students.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, I present and discuss the findings from the program evaluation of how the Community College (CC) as a whole and within departments implement CCCS policies that are intended to create targeted support for PT students and students dealing with economic instability. I have placed these findings in context of the program evaluation to generate meaning according to the research questions as well as the needs of the primary users of the evaluation - in this case, CC. The study was guided by these questions:

RQ1: What Colorado Community College System (CCCS) policies are in place that affect Post-Traditional students and students facing economic instability?

a. What is the focus - academic or financial - of these policies?

RQ2: How did one community college within the system implement those policies across campus, within individual departments, and in the classroom?

RQ3: How does the implementation of policies at the individual college level affect the ability of Post-Traditional students and students dealing with economic instability to be successful within the classroom?

To begin, I present findings from my content analysis of the CCCS policies. I then give an overview of how CC interprets these policies, first at the institutional level, and then at the departmental level. I also describe how this policy implementation affects the ability of PT students and students dealing with economic instability to be successful in their classes, and by extension their degree or certificate programs. Finally, I discuss the themes I identified throughout the study. Using the data gathered from 18 participant interviews in four different departments, I take the data and, using an inductive thematic approach, separate the data into themes. The two overarching themes that I identified throughout the study explored the topics of communication and fiscal restraints, and the subsequent themes explored the nuanced aspects of these findings. The next section examines the CCCS policies in more detail and why I determined that they applied to PT students or students experiencing economic instability. Furthermore, I expand on how the CC interpreted and implemented these policies, drawing from documentary and interview data.

CCCS Policies

Due to the neoliberal nature of higher education, the CCCS must walk a fine line between creating policies that help students succeed and being able to meet the government metrics for the colleges to be eligible to award Title IV funding. Even though the system and the community colleges within the system intend to help students graduate, they are still a business that must meet certain quotas and be aware of their budget. Therefore, all the policies enacted within the system and implemented at the CC level are situated within the neoliberal context. This can look like weighing the costs of repairs and upgrades to facilities against the potential benefits the upgrades could have to enhance the student experience against, or the cost of keeping a program functioning that does not have a high usage.

Out of 196 policies that govern the CCCS system, only 78 apply directly to students. Of those 78, I determined 15 policies applied directly to PT students or students experiencing economic instability, with another nine that loosely applied. This section examines the language of each policy and explains how it applies to PT students or students experiencing economic instability. For the policies I found that loosely apply to the focus of this study, I provide information as to how the policy loosely or indirectly applies to these populations.

A few of the policies that I determined directly or indirectly to PT students or students facing economic instability I did not include in this study. This is because these policies were in response to the federal or state guidelines and thus did not originate from the CCCS and speak to its efforts to support PT students or students dealing with economic instability. Therefore, these specific policies did not inform the questions for the evaluations. These included: SP 4-10a, SP 4-10b, SP 4-15/SP 4-40, BP 4-22, SP 4-24a, BP 4-41, and BP 9-73/SP 9-73. ("Policies and Procedures", 2021). SP 4-10a pertains to the application and enrollment process; students must apply to the college and enroll in classes to be considered an active student. SP 4-10b pertains to registration and student load; this policy reviews general registration requirements for students and defines the census date, which is the date where students are no longer allowed to add or drop classes for a term. SP 4-15 defines lawful presence, which is required to obtain in-state tuition rates, and SP 4-40 defines in-state classification. These two policies also consider the requirements for undocumented students as well as citizens and eligible non-citizens to receive in state tuition rates. BP 4-22 allows students to receive in-state tuition who moved from out of state because their company transferred them to Colorado; I chose not to include this policy, as the only time students could qualify for this was if they were already employed and being transferred. Therefore, this policy pertains to students who are employed full-time and less likely to experience economic instability, and thus do not apply to this study. SP 4-24a defines the minimum qualifications for receiving Colorado State Merit Aid. BP 4-41 outlines requirements for colleges to obtain Colorado Diversity Grants, specifically for the intention of increasing the representation of underrepresented groups at the college. Finally, BP 9-73/SP 9-73 defines the colleges' responsibility for monitoring federal and state programs to ensure they meet the qualifications set by the CCCS/state/federal government. The remaining policies that I analyzed guided the creation of the questions I used for the evaluation, as they could impact PT students and students dealing with economic instability. The full list of CCCS policies that directly affected students which I reviewed are in table 3.

Table 3.
CCCS Policies That Affect PT Students and Students Dealing with Economic Instability

Policies Not Applicable to Study	Date Policy Adopted and/or Revised	Policy Name
SP 4-10a	Adopted June 2019	Application and Enrollment
SP 4-10b	Adopted June 2019	Registration and Student Load
SP 4-15/SP 4-40	Adopted June 2010/Revised June 2015	Verification of Lawful Presence for In State Tuition
BP 4-22	Adopted August, 2007	In-State Tuition for Economic Development Relocations
SP 4-24a	Adopted April, 2016	Colorado Student Merit Aid Awarding Procedure
BP 4-41	Repealed June, 2021	Colorado Diversity Grants
BP 9-73/SP 9-73	Adopted February 2009/Adopted March 2014	Monitoring of Federal and State Aid Programs
Policies Used for Study		

Students		Policy Name
Policies Directly Apply to Study		
BP 4-20	Revised February 2013	Student Tuition and Fees/Scholarships
SP 4-20b	Revised April 2008	Financial Aid Professional Judgement
SP 4-20c	Revised August 2016	Return of Title IV Funds
SP 4-20d	Revised August 2014	Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) for Financial Aid
BP 4-23/ SP 4-23	Revised June 2009	College Opportunity Fund
SP 4-24	Revised April 2016	Colorado Student Grant (CSG) Awarding Procedure
Educational Programs		
Policies Loosely Apply to Study		
SP 9-41	Revised December 2019	Assessment for College Readiness
BP 9-43	Readopted August 2001	Certification of Workplace Literacy Programs
Policies Directly Apply to Study		
SP 9-20a	Adopted August 2001	Service Area Principles and Guidelines
BP 9-42/ SP 9-42	Revised February 2015/Revised November 2017	Prior Learning Assessment Credit
BP 9-72/ SP 9-72	Revised December 2015	Transfer of Post-Secondary Credits from Area Technical Colleges to Community Colleges
BP 9-80/ SP 9/80a	Revised December 2020	Academic Standards and Practices

Note. The table also includes the date the policy was adopted and/or revised in order to illustrate the length of time since some policies have been reviewed.

One policy I asked the President about during our interview took them off guard, because they stated they had not even reviewed that particular policy for their entire tenure as president – over 12 years – which highlights the issue that many policies may be outdated, especially given the ever changing world of technology in today's society. The President did state that as a practice, the CCCS seeks to review policies every five years. However, as noted from the table above, many policies have not been revised or updated for longer than the five years stated – as many as 20 years for some. In chapter five, I address the outdated nature of the policies and make recommendations to ensure that policies are relevant and still provide the indented impact on students, especially in this ever-changing society.

The following section presents findings from the content analysis that I determined that related to PT students and students dealing with economic instability. Because the content analysis informed my interview questions, I interweave information from the interviews with participants regarding these specific policies to demonstrate how these policies affected students at the CC. As such, the format of the section first addresses CCCS policies that directly apply to PT students and students dealing with economic instability and then details the policies that loosely apply to these student populations.

Policies That Directly Apply to PT Students and Students Dealing with Economic Instability

BP 4-20 Student Tuition and Fees/Scholarships. This policy defines the types of fees assessed to students, scholarship categories, and overall tuition requirements for colleges within CCCS. Although each section looked at drastically different components of the monetary assessment, the policies still affected PT students and students facing economic instability. The charging of tuition and fees and the addition - or lack thereof - of scholarships could potentially affect students' ability to be successful in classes.

Tuition. First, in the tuition section, I noted the following sentence:

> Only registered students paying the required tuition will be permitted to attend classes for which they are registered. The president of the college may provide exemptions to this rule only in the event that the student who is exempted is registered at the college and paying tuition (Tuition and Fees, 2021).

I interpreted the language as applying to students auditing classes, but I was more concerned with the president being able to make exceptions to attendance rules; specifically, what such exceptions would look like, and whether the president had leeway to make any additional exemptions, such as for students that were having difficulty paying for their classes due to economic instability issues. I asked the participants in Administration how they interpreted this portion of the policy, and the results were surprising. Participants reported that the CC did not have any plan in place for allowing auditing of classes, so auditing was not a major part of the procedure at CC. In fact, with regard to the tuition section of the policy, the president noted, "Wow! I have not read this policy in a long time! I have been president for almost 12 years and I don't ever remember a conversation about that one". However, the president made the determination that the only time they may allow some sort of exception is if the CC made a mistake, such as mistakenly removing a student from a class that they should be in. Otherwise, there were to be no exceptions made for tuition charges; the tuition cost was set and not subject to change.

Fees. The fees section of this policy states:

> Such itemization shall not be required for any academic course fee that is specifically listed in the course catalog. Any optional fees or charges that are automatically assessed unless the student chooses not to pay, except for health care fees, shall be refunded by the institution or organization that received the fee, upon request, to any student who paid the fee (Tuition and Fees, 2021).

To understand what the CC determined as "optional fees", and if any fees could be appealed or refunded for specific situations, I asked the participants how they interpreted this policy and how it was implemented at the CC. The participants in Administration all explained that the optional fees were something that could be purchased separately from the class and not necessarily needed for success in the class, such as a calculator fee that a student could elect to waive if they already had a calculator. However, each participant noted something different about their understanding of policy. For example, one participant stated, "I understand [this policy] to mean that it's an optional fee is automatically assessed and the student requests a refund, the refund must be issued", whereas another participant noted, "it looks to me like it's about transparency and ensuring that students understand what every fee is and not hiding within and that it has to be publicly displayed to them within the catalog." The participants reported that the fee assessment, in general, was usually based on specific classes that had consumable resources, or costs for materials cost a tremendous amount, such as the surgical technology program. These fees are mandatory because the materials are required for successfully completing the course.

Scholarships. The CCCS policy for scholarships includes four categorical scholarships. The first are scholarships for senior citizens - that is, for ages 60 and older - where students classified as senior citizens can receive up to 50% off the cost of tuition.

The second category is for state employees attending classified training programs, which are eligible to receive up to 50% of tuition for specific certifications required for the State Department. The third category is for farm/ranch management and small business assistance. According to the policy, the system president specifies the amount for this scholarship category each year per student prior to the start of the academic year. The last category is for residence hall scholarships for students living on campus (Tuition and Fees, 2021).

None of the scholarship categories specifically addressed the needs of PT students or students experiencing economic instability. Therefore, I asked participants for their thoughts on the feasibility of the CCCS designating a new scholarship category for PT students or for students experiencing economic instability, and how doing so would affect the ability of students to be successful in their classes. The responses to this question were mixed. While the participants agreed that an additional scholarship category would positively affect the ability for students to be successful in class, there was some hesitancy as to whether that would be feasible. The president noted:

> So, I guess I'll give two different answers to that. So, one is, I think anytime you can reduce barriers to success, that will support student completion. And it is possible that with additional scholarships, then you're reducing economic hardships, which may be a barrier to success…. But since the majority of our students in some ways are adult learners, it's really difficult to talk about how you would have a categorical scholarship for adult learners. If we were 10% adult learners, that would be one thing. So, then I think the question is, "What do you do in support of the bulk of your population?" So, I think, it's probably better to

> think about more broadly, how do you support students? It would probably be a little different if you were a [baccalaureate degree granting institution] where 5% of the population is adult learners and you could identify them

Financial considerations were common across data collection, as participants and policies cited fiscal considerations for any decisions that are made, including those about which students to award scholarships. Participants reported that most of the revenue for both CC and the CCCS comes from tuition and fees and considering a large majority of CC students either identify as a PT student or experience economic instability, instituting a new scholarship category that would effectively limit the revenue would not be financially sustainable. As one in CC Administration noted:

> What I wonder, however, though, is knowing how Colorado funds education and that currently only nine percent of the state budget goes to fund higher education in all, not just the community colleges, but all public higher education, we have to rely so heavily on tuition dollars. So if we had a different tuition rate for students that were experiencing those particular challenges, I worry about the fiscal impact that would then have on the schools and then have to make decisions about what do we cut, because 78% of [CC's] budget is dedicated to personnel, whether that is disability support services personnel, veterans support personnel, advisors, financial aid, obviously faculty instructors, facilities, all of those types of things.

However, the participants agreed that it would be beneficial if the CC and the system reviewed data to determine if targeted scholarship for these demographics could be effective, such as PT students or students experiencing economic instability that are within 15 credits of completing their degree or certificate program - for example - could receive a scholarship to help them graduate with their degree or certificate. One participant stated:

> Could we give a scholarship for adult learners who have 45 credits, to encourage them to complete? Could we tease it out even more? And then for the economic piece, if they have 45 credits or more, or they have this much in their certificate. We're trying to get them to complete, so I think it would be interesting to see some data and I could support that.

SP 4-20b Financial Aid Professional Judgement. A college can update or reduce a student's Expected Family Contribution (EFC) if the student's EFC does not reflect their current circumstances. EFC is a numeric value calculated by the government that states what a student can pay for college which determines the level of federal, state, and institutional aid a student receives. For example, the college can adjust the EFC if a student becomes unemployed or loses benefits such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or the student has additional dependents. (Professional Judgement, 2021). A reduction in a student's EFC means that a student may be able to receive additional aid to apply toward the cost of their cost of attendance.

My interest in this policy was twofold. First, I wanted to understand how the Financial Aid Professional Judgement process worked at CC for reducing a student's EFC and offering additional aid. Second, I wanted to see what resources were available to students that were denied additional aid from the financial aid professional judgement process; for example, if students had a low enough EFC that they received all the aid they were eligible for and could not receive any additional aid, or if the financial aid office was unable to reduce the EFC enough to be able to receive additional aid based on the students' circumstances. Financial aid participants generally reported that there were not any alerts in place to identify students that could benefit from a professional judgement; instead, the students needed to self-identify that there was an issue. As one participant from the financial aid office stated:

> I'm going to be honest, I don't know that we do [have alerts in place]. I mean, I think COVID has opened the door for this a lot in the past year. And in recognizing that, we always knew it was happening, but there wasn't a clear way to catch that from students. Because no one necessarily outwardly, I don't know, anecdotally, from my experience, wants to just acknowledge I'm struggling necessarily. But, when it does come up, then we usually can try to intervene in some capacity.

To better serve the students and make them aware that financial aid professional judgement was an option, the financial aid staff updated the financial aid office's website to include information about professional judgement and what it could cover on the main page. Additionally, the financial aid office has taken steps to change the format of the form so it is more interactive. With this change, students can select the financial issue they were experiencing, and the form will tell them specifically what the student needed to submit to be considered for a professional judgement. This was a major upgrade from the previous system because the majority of students either had an incomplete form or were denied for not having the correct information in order to process the professional judgement.

That said, if a student was unable to receive additional federal financial aid through the professional judgement process, there were little additional financial resources from the federal or state government, or CC that the students could pursue. According to the participants, the students were directed to submit scholarships applications - which all students are eligible to fill out, not just PT students or students experiencing economic hardship - or to look into third party loans, which are credit based and usually have higher interest rates than federal student loans, meaning that students would likely have to pay much more during the life of the loan. Through counseling sessions, financial aid staff could provide information to students on other non-financial resources, such as the school or local food bank if the student was facing immediate need; however, there were no additional fiscal resources they could provide to help students experiencing financial hardship, a theme that is reflected in findings presented later in this chapter.

SP 4-20c Return of Title IV (R2T4) Funds. To continue receiving federal financial aid funds, a student must be successful in their classes, which means passing their classes with a minimum of a 2.0 grade point. When a student is unsuccessful in their classes for a term – that is, when they receive a letter grade of a D or lower – or withdraws from their classes, a college is required to calculate the amount of aid a student has earned and the remaining portion of unearned aid must be returned to the federal government (R2T4 Requirements, 2021). As the student has many times already received the financial aid and resulting refund, returning aid to the government often results in the student owing a balance to the college. This balance must be paid before the student is able to register for additional classes or receive their official transcripts, which can make it more difficult for a student to continue in classes (Personal communication, [Name withheld], April 15, 2021).

As this policy could affect both PT students and students facing economic instability, I wanted to determine if there were any exceptions that could be made. According to the participants, CC followed the CCCS policy fairly closely. One participant from the financial aid office noted:

> R2T4s can happen for students that typically withdraw from all of their courses partway into the semester. I believe the federal cutoff is 60% of their overall time in class. If that amount of time has elapsed, then they won't owe some amount back. But if a student withdraws from all of their courses after the withdraw date, they owe a certain amount of their financial aid back, that unearned aid. So, it just depends on when they withdraw as to how much they owe back to R2T4. The later in the semester, typically the less it is. And then once they hit that break point of attending past I think it's 60% of their total time in that course, then they don't typically owe.

The CCCS policy states that students can inform the college shortly after they withdraw that they intend to enroll in a similar class later in the same term, and if that is the case the student would not go through the R2T4 process until the date the federal government determined that they were required to complete it (R2T4, 2021). Additionally, if a student does go through the R2T4 process but re-enrolls within the same class within 180 days, the R2T4 process would be reversed (R2T4, 2021). One point of note, however, was that several participants in the financial aid office stated that information about the process and outcomes could be better communicated to the student.

When asked how the process could be improved at CC, another participant in the financial aid office stated, “I feel like clear communication, but also open communication about what is viable and what isn’t.”.

SP 4-20d Satisfactory Academic Progress for Financial Aid. Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) measures a student’s performance to maintain eligibility to receive financial aid (Satisfactory Academic Progress, 2021). Students must maintain a minimum of 2.0 Cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA), successfully pass at least 67% of the classes they have attempted (Cumulative Completion Rate), and graduate with their degree or certificate within 150% of the allotted time allowed for the program. For example, if a program has 60 credits, the student must graduate from that program within 90 attempted credits - this could mean classes they have failed or classes from which they have withdrawn. Additionally, SAP is related to the R2T4 process in that if students withdraw from all their classes in a semester, thus going through the R2T4 process, they will also automatically be placed on SAP and must appeal to regain eligibility to receive financial aid. Every participant agreed that the number one issue affecting the ability of PT students and students experiencing economic instability to be successful in their class was financial, which made students unable to afford their classes because they have to focus their financial and time resources elsewhere. As one participant stated:

> I think, I mean, it's a huge life disrupter, because sometimes it's not just one thing… it becomes not only one thing leads into another. If your car breaks down, now you can't get to work, so now you have less money, and now you can't afford housing. It compounds upon it.

Therefore, being ineligible for federal financial aid could present a large barrier for many students to be able to graduate.

Specifically, for this study, I wanted to determine the likelihood for SAP approval for students, and if/how financial aid employees were able to use professional judgement to make a decision for approval or denial. According to participants, the employees in the financial aid office can use a great deal of professional judgement to determine whether to approve or deny a student. Generally speaking, the financial aid office tends to approve the SAP appeal if it was the students' first appeal; their reasoning being that everyone has difficult times and they should be given a chance to rectify the situation. As one financial aid participant stated, "As long as they have a really fleshed out appeal, those are typically more often approved. I would say probably in the ballpark of 80%-90% are approved." However, the solidifying factor as to whether the financial aid office approves a student's SAP appeal is the student's plan for success; a student must have a good plan for success that addresses the reason that they were unsuccessful. For example, if a student was unsuccessful because they had to work extra hours at their job, the SAP committee would want to see that they had reduced their hours at work. The participant went on to say:

> I've seen students submit appeals where they said, "Well, I just didn't really want to focus on school that semester." That appeal is not going to get approved. We always have that discussion. We say, "I know that might be the feeling, but that's not going to get approved unless you have a verified extenuating circumstance that to our appeals committee feels like a real reason to not attend school. Not just because Call of Duty came out with a new game, but that isn't a reason to not

attend school. We want to know the circumstance, but more importantly, what changes are being put in place to make sure that student can be successful moving forward.

If a student has one appeal approved but ends up on SAP again in the subsequent semester for not successfully completing their classes, the likelihood of approval for additional appeals diminishes, especially if the reason the student was unsuccessful remained the same as the one for which they received approval in a prior process. In this case, the student must have a compelling reason that they were unsuccessful again. If a student is not approved, they will be required to pay for a term out of pocket and successfully pass all their classes for a semester with at least a 2.0 term GPA before re-appealing their SAP status for a future semester.

BP 4-23/SP 4-23 College Opportunity Fund. The College Opportunity Fund (COF) is a stipend given to in-state students on a per credit basis; the Colorado Department of Higher Education determines the amount per credit each academic year (College Opportunity Fund, 2021; CDHE, 2021). Much like the SAP process, students only receive COF for up to 150% of their attempted credits. If a student has attempted more than the allotted credits, they can submit a COF waiver to be considered for additional allotments of COF.

Specifically, the COF policy states, "A state institution of higher education may annually grant a one year waiver of the lifetime credit hour limitation for up to five percent of the eligible undergraduate students enrolled in the state institution of higher education (College Opportunity Fund, 2021)." This policy could make it difficult for returning PT students to obtain additional or different qualifications. The students could still need several credits – more than it would take in a year to be able to receive the degree or certificate. Additionally, as previously discussed, there is a greater likelihood that a student cannot attend full time, which means that a one-year waiver may not be appropriate for a student that can only take a few classes at a time.

I asked participants in the financial aid office about their opinion of updating the CCCS policy to allow for a certain amount of credits granted for the waiver rather than a blanket one-year policy. While one participant stated that most institutions have become fairly flexible with allowing additional COF funding, each participant agreed that updating the policy to have a specific set of credits rather than a blanket one-year policy would positively affect students' ability to be successful in class and potentially graduate with a degree or certificate. As one participant noted, "You're right, I do agree that the majority of those students likely would be taking six credits, so it's going to take them longer."

However, the question regarding the additional COF waiver led several participants to question why a student would be in this position to begin with, as needing a waiver would effectively mean that a student did not successfully pass 50% of the classes needed, or at minimum 50% of the classes they took were not needed for the degree or certificate. This led to a deeper conversation about the Financial Aid process, and the participants noted that when starting college, many students do not truly understand how their current decisions will affect their future outcomes. Participants reported that students are not properly made aware of how the financial aid process works, including requirements for eligibility and limits on the amount of financial aid they can receive. Additionally, the participants reported that many students do not understand the relationship between cost and time to completion, so they can end up being frustrated with how long it takes to complete a degree or certificate program if they are not attending classes full time – which is not a possibility for many PT students and students facing economic instability that have other responsibilities outside of school that limit their time. As one participant in the financial aid office stated:

> [B]ut there's also some reality to it that I like I said, it costs more or it's going to take you longer to complete. And the more time you're in school then there's more time you're not potentially either moving on or earning money. Those other pieces of the conversation are just getting missed.

SP 4-24 Colorado Student Grant Awarding Procedure. This policy focuses on requirements to be able to earn the Colorado Student Grant (CSG) which is essentially the Colorado's version of the Pell grant, but it differs slightly from the Pell Grant in that the CSG has a limited amount of funding, so when the funding is used, there is no more aid available to distribute. CSG also differs from the COF in that the COF is given to all in-state residents, but the CSG is allocated in the same way that the federal Pell grant is with students with EFCs of up to $7,500 eligible to receive aid and with the aid amounts increasing as the EFC decreases (Colorado Student Grant, 2021). To qualify for CSG, a student must be a United States citizen or qualifying non-citizen, have received their GED or high school diploma, not be concurrently enrolled in high school, and meet the additional requirements that are required for federal financial aid such as selective service registration (Colorado Student Grant, 2021). Students who qualify for the Federal Pell Grant are also eligible for the CSG as well as students that have an EFC that is too high for the Pell Grant but within 150% of the Pell limit - all provided that the CC has funding, as Colorado institutions are only allotted a certain amount of funds per year. Institutions must share the total amount funds from the state and then distribute the funds at the beginning of the term - another notable difference from the Pell, which the federal government allocates to students rather than given to the institution to allocate to students.

For this study, I was interested in understanding how the process of how CSG is allocated at CC worked at CC. According to the participants in the financial aid office, students who meet the requirements are eligible for up to $3,500 for the upcoming 2021-2022 academic year, meaning up to $1,750 per semester. However, this amount is prorated, meaning that if students enroll half time which is six out of 12 credits, they receive half of the available funding, or $875 per term with $1,750 for the year; $1,312 per term at nine credits, and so on. As such, students receive more funding if they are registered full time, but as discussed in previous chapters, this is not always feasible for either PT students with responsibilities outside of school, or for students dealing with economic instability, that are focusing on trying to meet their more basic needs of Maslow's hierarchy.

Because the CSG amounts are prorated, there is no additional available funding for students that have received the maximum amount of aid for their credit level; meaning a student cannot receive the full amount of CSG if they are registered at half time. Interestingly, as a result of change to federal policy during the COVID pandemic, the financial aid office was given the ability to convert unused federal or state work study funds – which is a lump sum of funds given the institution like the CSG – into an emergency student grant, that could be given supplementally to certain students.

However, the target population for the emergency grant was non-resident students – that is, students who had to pay the out of state tuition prices who were ineligible to receive the CSG, as one of CSG's requirements is students be state residents. As a result of these policies, the financial aid office was only able to award the emergency student grant to 85 students total for the 2021 academic year.

SP 9-20a Service Area Principles and Guidelines. This policy identifies service area, which is the geographic region in which that CC resides and is charged with serving the community within (Service Area, 2021). Participants reported that colleges are discouraged from engaging constituents outside of their geographic service area. In practice, this policy is often interpreted as a limit on student recruitment marketing or engaging businesses and high schools that are another community college's service area unless your college offers a program or degree that is not offered at the other college (Service Area, 2021). With regard to service areas, one CC Administrator noted:

> Although we do have some agreements in place that if [the neighboring community college] were to come into our service area and there should be some agreement to say, "Yes, we're going to offer these courses here." in service areas agreements. That CC is located in the next county over, with some overlap in our county, our service area. We do have service area agreements and occasionally those are exercised. However, partners (such as our school districts) also engage the other community college in offering concurrent enrollment courses/programming to high school students. This is one example that supported one of my other statements about collective efforts to support the educational and workforce needs of the communities we serve.

The participant suggested that the community college can partner with one another institution to serve a region if, say one college has a certain program that is not available at the other college, and vice versa. The college can send the students to the adjoining CC for that particular program.

For this study, CC functions somewhat differently than other colleges within the CCCS, as there are multiple CC campuses in separate locations, and these campuses largely operate autonomously from one another - that is, they function as an independent college with little interaction with the other campuses. Prior to COVID, students were generally relegated to taking classes at the campus at which they were immediately enrolled and were unable to take classes at any other campuses. This presented a problem for many PT students that needed specific classes but were unable to meet the scheduling requirements due to their other commitments outside of school. One participant in the advising department noted:

> So, one of the things that has changed about this is the way that we schedule. Prior to this, we were very much... We almost existed like four separate colleges within one college. We would have our schedule. [A different campus] would have their schedule, [A third campus] would have their schedule and then online. And it was everyone did their own thing. We didn't necessarily talk to one another. And so what you would have happened is students were needing classes at their home campus, but we couldn't run a class because we didn't have enough enrollment to warrant running the class. But another campus was able to run it because they had higher interest in that particular course. So one thing that's happened since COVID is all of the groups have come together. We are

> collaborating across the colleges for real time remote and saying, "Let's run this together." We will list it one time and students from all of the campuses can take that particular course. It allows us to diversify the portfolio of courses available to any student. And they're not limited based on what's available at their particular campus.

To address students not being able to take classes at another campus if the necessary class is not available in order to be more flexible during the pandemic, each campus started offering what was termed "real time remote" classes, which allowed a student at one campus to enroll in a class at a different campus and attend via video conferencing application just as if they were attending in person. This gave students access to a plethora of new classes which may better fit their schedules. According to the participants in Administration, real time remote learning was a change that was going to continue post -COVID to better serve their population of students. The Administration participant noted, "[Real-time remote] has been a game changer. And students have responded well to it. And I fully expect to see that continuing in the future".

BP 9-42/ SP 9-42 Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Credit. CCCS's Prior Learning Assessment policy allows students to receive credit for prior learning and experience by demonstrating that they have already met the learning objectives for certain classes (Prior Learning Assessment, 2021). Students can Receive PLA through taking standardized tests administered by the college or a certified testing company - such as College Level Examination Program (CLEP) - that evaluate their learning outcomes, as well as through portfolios of previous work experience that can demonstrate meeting the learning objectives. The CCCS policy states that there is no maximum number of credits that the student can earn through PLA if the student completes 25% of the total credits needed for the degree or certificate program at the institution in which they are earning the PLA - called a residency requirement (Prior Learning Assessment, 2021). Although there are a few exceptions, most of the programs at CC are 60 credits, so the CC organizational guidance has a mandatory residency requirement of 15 credits.

The participants in the advising department all stated that every class at CC offers the opportunity for PLA; however, very few students take advantage of the program, much less obtain a large number of credits. As one participant stated:

> With the exception of some of our career and technical education programs that have a better opportunity for [earning PLA] because the programs are actually set up for it, unless a student is in one of those programs specifically, it's probably fairly unlikely then that they would earn more than credit for just a few classes.

The participants identified a few reasons for this. First, it is possible that the students do not fully understand that PLA is an option for all the classes they might take. The staff discusses this opportunity for PLA with the students during orientation; however, they do not provide much detail about the benefits or process to pursue the PLA credits. Secondly, many PT students come to CC with a deficit mindset of their abilities. As one advising department participant stated:

> Some students come in and say, 'I haven't been to school in over 15 years, so I don't know anything'... Like, yeah, you haven't been to school for 15 years, but you have worked in a career for 15 years, and you've rocked that!

This participant stated that one way to help students flourish, and perhaps be able to take the PLA exams and award the students credit with more regularity, would be to help students to have a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset. This participant asserted that helping students to change their mentality can help them have the confidence to attempt the PLA credit tests or show off their prior work in a portfolio, as this quote shows:

> So, one thing for adult learners for us, as advisors in particular, is to really help them see what skills and strengths they have and double down on it and say, "That means going to class for you it's not going to be a struggle in a lot of ways, or that means that you *can* use your past experiences to help you receive credits and finish this program faster!"

BP 9-72/ SP 9-72 Transfer of Post-Secondary Credits from Area Technical Colleges to Community Colleges. This policy dictates that CCCS community colleges are required to accept credits - up to 75% of their total degree or certificate program, to account for the 25% residency requirement - from the three area technical schools in Colorado: Emily Griffith Technical College, Delta-Montrose Technical College, and Pickens Area Technical College (Technical Colleges, 2021). Additionally, students can transfer credit from other technical colleges “as long as they have national and regional accreditation”, according to one advising department participant. For this study, I wanted to see what the process was for transferring credit from an area technical college to CC. The advising department advised that this was an area of opportunity for CC related to how the staff advises students on the process, as well as the arduous process itself. As one participant noted, “although it is on our website, advisors really need to guide students through the process of having official transcripts sent to [the CC], and then they have to complete an additional form. It’s the transfer credit evaluation form”.

Currently, students must have their former college send the transcripts to the receiving college, and then once the transcripts have been received, the students must complete an additional form that will then ensure that the transfer credit evaluator examines the transcripts. Explaining the process, one participant from the advising department stated:

> And that basically allows the college to review the credit once they receive it. I've never worked at an institution that had a two-part process like that. I think it kind of gets in the way and holds things up. If a student doesn't complete it, they receive information from the Registrar's Office that they received the transcript but not the form, and they get the link. The communication does go out to students, but I don't think that it always connects, and that disconnect can lead to transfer credits hanging out for a while, which is not great.

As this participant shared, many students do not know they have to complete the additional form. As a result, the students end up missing their window to transfer credit because they are unaware of the two-step process. Additionally, even when both the transcript and the form are completed, participants report that it can take anywhere from 30 days to six weeks to review the transcripts for possible credit because CC only has one credit transfer coordinator for the entire college. During this waiting period, classes may have already started, and the student may be forced to take a class that they do not need, consequently wasting both time and money. This can be particularly difficult for both PT students and students dealing with economic instability, as any setback increases the likelihood the student will not be successful in their program.

While the CCCS policy states that colleges within the system must accept credits from the three area technical schools, the policy is unclear about what credits can transfer, or how the credits transfer in. One advising participant stated, “I mean, quite frankly, some of it will transfer, but it is very specific...a long time ago there was one very specific degree that those credits could transfer into, but we haven’t had that for quite some time.” Accordingly, it is uncertain as to whether the classes taken will transfer. If the credits do not transfer in, the only course of action is to have the students take PLA to cover the credit - but even that comes with a cost, since there is a fee to submit a transfer evaluation, and then an additional fee to take a PLA exam. Depending on the student’s situation, this may not be feasible.

BP 9-80/SP 9-80a Academic Standards and Practices. This policy sets a generic standard for the grading scale, with an A being Excellent of Superior, a B being Good, a C being Average, a D being Deficient, and an F being a failure (Academic Standards, 2021). This policy also gives additional grading codes for pass/fail, withdraw, auditing, etc. At CC, outside of the traditional A-F grading system, there is no set standard grading procedure in place college wide; how instructors grade is left up to the departments or to the individual instructors. For example, the science faculty only has one set guideline for the classes in their department, and that is that no more than five percent of the overall grade can come from extra credit. According to one faculty member, in some classes most of the grade is evaluated based on the exam. As the faculty member stated, “I know other instructors that have final exams that are 50% or more of the final course grade and that’s ok. High stakes, but ok.” Other faculty members may have no tests, but have students demonstrate their skills through other means like presentations, portfolios, projects, etc.

Additionally, the CCCS does not provide guidance on assignment due dates, and the CC does not have a standard policy on due dates other than a focus on early grading - before the census date when students are able to withdraw - "...so that students have an understanding very early in the semester what is a grade on a substantial assignment; it doesn't have to be a huge amount of weight but it has to be more than just an introduction discussion", as one faculty member clarified. Another faculty member I spoke with had originally started their teaching career being very strict when it came to due dates - even so much as having a "late assignments here" arrow pointed at the trash can. However, they learned that this was not conducive for PT students. As one participant in the advising department stated:

> These students do not consider themselves a student first. They have jobs and families that come before school, so often having a strict due date simply results in the students not submitting the assignment or withdrawing from or failing the class.

Therefore, many teachers have become more lenient with due dates and have moved more toward a competency-based system, where a student may still earn points even if they have to take a test multiple times. However, there are some faculty members that are still very stringent. As one faculty member stated:

> I've learned to offer students a lot of grace… I'm going to tell you in my discipline, I would rather have students do the work and turn it in late so they get the material… but this is not universal in my discipline.

Classroom Teaching. Classroom teaching affects PT students and students experiencing economic instability in several ways. Two different faculty members mentioned that the students at CC have such dynamic backgrounds that a standard approach to teaching is not conducive to their learning. Therefore, instead of simply teaching the material, these faculty members teach skills to the students that help them shift their mindsets and learn how to learn - especially if they have been away from school for an extended period of time, have many commitments outside of school, or have issues that arise which make it difficult for students to focus on school.

One faculty member has instituted a unit lesson in their courses focused on developing a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset. Since creating this unit, the faculty member reported a tremendous shift in the number of students who pass the class, as well as other classes thereafter. According to this faculty member:

> ...when I can get students to have a growth mindset, I really do see them learn more. They don't always get As but I seem them succeeding far more when I can see the change in mindset that any other single impact. And what I've seen is that they do better in their future classes.

Policies That Indirectly Apply to Student Demographics in Study

Several of the policies I identified do not directly affect PT students and students dealing with economic instability; however, these policies can still indirectly affect these student populations. This section discusses these policies, how the CC interprets and implements them, and how they can affect PT students and students dealing with economic instability.

BP 9-41/SP 9-41 Assessment for College Readiness. According to the policy, students that start college, or return after a long absence, must take an assessment for college readiness to determine if they have the necessary skills to be successful in college-level courses (College Readiness, 2021). Students who do not obtain a score on the assessment that indicates they are ready for college-level courses are required to take Developmental Education (DevEd) courses. Federal financial aid cannot be applied toward DevEd classes. This can be a major barrier to both PT students that have other obligations outside of class and for students experiencing economic instability, as they may not have the funds to pay for the classes. As one faculty member stated, "So there were two remediation reading and writing classes, and we were losing students. They were like '[expletive] this' ... and the thing is, they weren't getting any credit because financial aid couldn't apply to the remedial courses."

The CC has taken steps to address the issue of students not receiving credit for developmental or remedial education classes. For DevEd classes such as math and English, students can enroll in their regular classes in order to receive financial aid, such as English Composition or College Algebra, but they must also register for an accompanying class, called a "studio". This functions as supplementary instruction at the beginning or end of class during which the students are taught the basics necessary for success in the remainder of the class. However, one participant reported that this can be problematic because the class is over three hours long, which may not be feasible for students with additional commitments:

> [We tell them], 'You're going to enroll now, but if you're not ready, we're also going to enroll you in another three to five credits so that you're… well, I mean,

really, part of it is an investment of time. It's going to take you a lot more time'. And that might not be doable for a lot of students.

One change a faculty member has instituted in their classes to address this issue is to team teach with another faculty member in one of the entry level biology courses. After the first exam that covers basic chemistry, the students that did not pass are grouped into one class, while the other students that did pass are grouped into the other. One faculty member teaches the course to the students that successfully passed the first exam, and the other faculty member teaches the students that did not pass. The faculty member reflected on this partnership, saying:

> And then we work again with those students on not just chemistry, but on study skills. So, we feel like it's our job to teach them not only the biology content, but how to learn the content. So, that's usually what they're missing, especially if they've never taken a science course; they don't know how to learn science, and that's a skill. And who's going to teach it to them if we don't?

Although the same content is taught in each class, for those students that need additional support, the focus shifts the focus on how to learn the content rather than just the content itself.

According to the faculty member, after making this change, course passage rates went from under 50% to well over 80%. Additionally, students perform better in future classes. The faculty member stated:

> The students who take our course get higher A's, they get more A's in their future classes, and they pass at a higher rate. So that means that we're not only teaching

them the biology, but we're teaching them the skills they need to succeed in future science courses.

BP 9-43 Certification of Workplace Literacy Programs. Workplace literacy programs form a partnership between the community college and a business where a community college teaches basic literacy – akin to an English as a Second Language course or a DevEd class – at a business "for the benefit of employees" (Workplace Literacy, 2021). My interest in this policy was two-fold. First, I wanted to find out if CC had any programs or partnerships like this. Second, I wanted to determine if college credit could be earned for any of these classes, which could potentially benefit PT students and students experiencing economic instability, as the employer would be paying for the classes, so there would be less cost for the student.

The CC did not have any current workplace literacy programs. In fact, of the participants that I spoke with, only the President knew what they were, and they stated there had not been a workplace literacy program since before their tenure, which was decades earlier. The President shared that lack of fiscal resources was the primary reason for discontinuing the program:

> [One of the campuses] had a historic relationship with some school districts that had partially funded the program, and the other campuses did not, and state funding kept being reduced for those programs, now there's very little funding at all. And then I think the population in our communities changed somewhat and other services improved. So, it became very difficult to run them even close to economically. The program has a third-party contractor who runs the program now, it was the only way that we could continue it, and we actually had to shut

> one of our sites. It's very difficult to run adult education economically in Colorado right now, most of the fellow community colleges are struggling as well or have closed them.

Just one of the campuses at the CC had an adult learning center where students could receive similar services, as well as support for taking the GED. The President stated that the CC was losing money on the program by having it open at multiple campuses, so the president elected to close several of them and only have one open. Although they would like to be able to offer these services, the fiscal constraints were too great. The President remarked, “It absolutely should be part of our mission, but I don’t know that there’s a way we can do it. If we did have these programs, we would have to look at what other areas to cut”, which demonstrates how other programs would suffer if workplace literacy programs or additional services for adult learners were created.

Themes

Building on the information from the analysis above and the analysis from the interviews and documentary resources, I identified several common themes throughout the data. The overarching themes revolved around communication issues and fiscal restraints. This section explains the themes and dives into the nuances of the themes found in each of the four departments from which I collected data.

Communication Issues

One overarching theme I identified focuses on the issue of communication. In this section I break down the different communication issues I identified and share interview data that align with these themes. Sub-themes relating to the parent theme of communication include communication between departments, issues with written communication, and communication to students.

Theme 1: Communication Between Departments. The first theme I identified was that there is a breakdown in communication between different departments, between departments and faculty, and between the college itself and the various departments. This communication breakdown hinders the ability of different departments and the college to fully serve students. Specifically, communication breakdown occurred due to a lack of understanding about how other departments interact with students. The student experience is intertwined in multiple departments, and the work of one department can directly affect another. As one Financial Aid participant stated while discussing the student experience:

> What we're discovering in Financial Aid, and especially on the SAP committee is that [other departments such as advising] are not so trained, which is a huge disappointment to us. I see that maybe like 95% percent of the time. How can they advise a student on their program when they have a GPA of .6 and is in danger of losing their financial aid - like to be able to deeply advise them on their path, and not just 'should they take Math 101 or Math 115'.

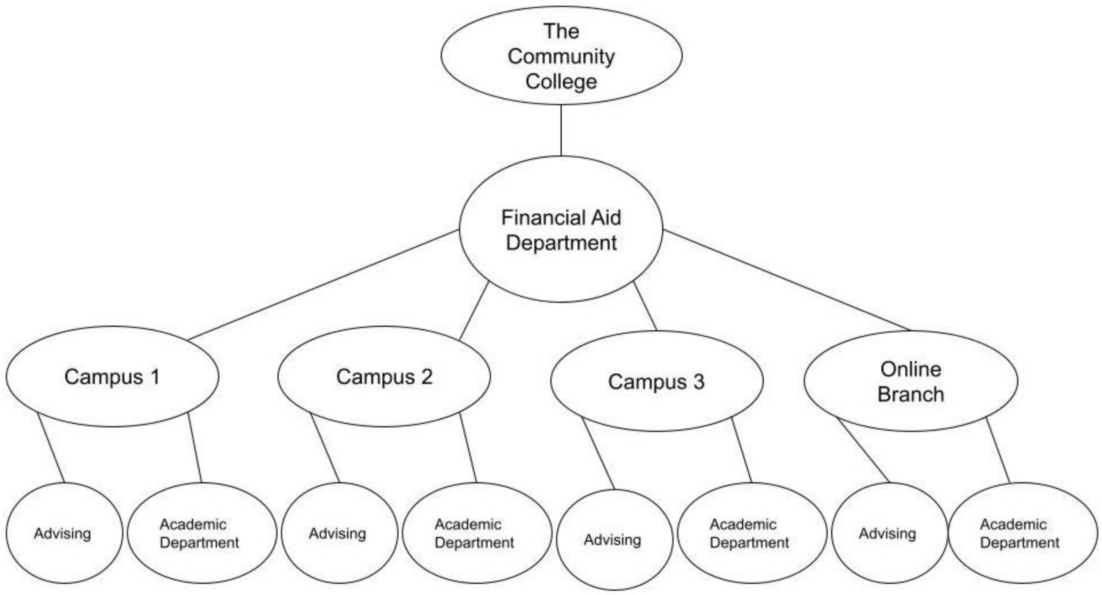
Another participant echoed a similar sentiment with the faculty:

> I think the other piece that is untapped as well, or departments-wise is faculty. There is no overlap, I bet half the faculty at our college do not understand how students pay for school, or how important it is that financial aid then helps people pay for college. So, I mean, just the similar scenario, could a faculty member help the conversation about 'have you paid your bill? Do you have the financial

> resources set up?' Are they also having that conversation, because they have a different connection with the student than we do? I mean, students see us as a service, whereas they're going to class every day. The student has put in a rapport with that faculty member, could they help influence or change those conversations? Or even, when someone brings up a concern to them, can they suggest the Professional Judgement form?

Siloed Departments. The first challenge participants highlighted that contributed to the communication breakdown was in part due to the siloed nature of departments at CC. Instead of working closely with each other, departments tend to individually with students on issues pertaining to their unique department. Department staff then tell students that they need to go to another department in order to address a different aspect of the student's experience (Craig, 2017). The structure of the CC campus versus college wide departments is visualized in figure 4. Following this figure is a description of how the CC departments function.

Figure 4.
Community College Structure



Note. Each department under each individual campus and online branch work with – advise or teach – students at their own campus. The financial aid office works with students at all campuses.

The college has three branch campuses and an online branch. Each of these campuses effectively operates autonomously, meaning that each has their own advising department and separate faculty that specifically work with the students at that particular campus. I will refer to departments that advise students on the individual campuses as campus-wide departments. Additionally, when referring to the faculty, I will use the term academic department to differentiate between the faculty departments and the administrative units. Financial aid, on the other hand, is a department that advises and processes aid for all the students in the college regardless of the campus the student is located. This department - as well as the college administration - will be referred to as college-wide departments.

The siloed nature of departments is in part due to the advising structure at CC. As a result of that structure, departments do not communicate with one another about how they support particular students. For example, one participant from the financial aid office stated:

> And this is just my personal experience; [the Academic Advisors] do not emphasize helping struggling students… like, 'ok Jimmy, I see that you got all Ds last semester and now you're ineligible for financial aid… what's going on? What do you need?'

According to several participants in the financial aid office, academic advisors tend to advise students on the classes to take within the student's pathway as part of the college's pathway advising model. However, advisors do not advise on how that is possibly going to affect their future ability to receive financial aid.

Participants additionally lamented other departments' lack of consideration for financial aid students' decisions, as financial aid can play a crucial role in whether a student is able to graduate from their degree or certificate program. For example, Federal Title IV has a maximum amount that a student can receive for either the Pell Grant or for federal loans. The Pell limit is called the Lifetime Eligibility Usage (LEU) which is 600% of the maximum yearly allowance for Pell Grant, whereas the maximum amount for federal loans - called the aggregate loan limit - is $23,000 for subsidized loans, and $34,500 for unsubsidized loans - this limit applies to students at both community colleges and baccalaureate granting institutions, which means that theoretically, a student could take out their aggregate loan amounts while attempting receive an associate's degree. As one participant in the financial aid office stated:

> My bigger concern here, though, would be if someone has hit their Pell and loan limits and still have not graduated. There's got to be a better wraparound service. And again, just even letting people understand where those limits are would help in the planning and preparing piece to your educational track.

If a student has attended multiple institutions, changed their major multiple times, or had other life events that would extend their time to degree, they may approach these financial aid limits, which means that a student would no longer be eligible to receive any federal financial aid. According to participants, the Academic Advisors cannot and do not advise on the financial implications of decisions such as switching majors or dropping classes. Being unable to advise on financial aid can also cause a myriad of other issues in addition to reaching the aggregate limits - that is maximum loan limits - such as a balance due to a student going through the R2T4 process.

Despite these financial implications, participants in the advising department reported that they lacked the ability to fully advise students because Academic Advisors do not have access to adequate information. For example, the advising department does not have access to information from the financial aid office. Therefore, the Advisors are unable to see the student's EFC, whether they are ineligible for financial aid due to SAP, their cumulative GPA and cumulative completion rate, if they have taken out loans before, or if they are close to their maximum loan or Pell limits. One participant in the advising department reported being constrained by the CC's conservative view on sharing privacy information, such as financial information:

> Our financial aid office interprets privacy laws [FERPA] very conservatively, so we don't have any access to financial information that we could use to help the students make decisions that would help them… so we really haven't been able to get lists of, say Pell eligible students that we could pursue or check in on.

As a result of a lack of information sharing, advisors were relegated to helping students choose their next classes which advisors reported limited their ability to help students plan financially.

Additionally, the department siloing starts from the time that employees are hired. According to one financial aid participant, "we're basically running our own onboarding process at the same, or I guess in tandem, with the standard academic onboarding process. So, weaving that together would be so much nicer." Essentially each department has their own "onboarding process" in addition to the standard employment orientation. According to the participant, the students would be better supported if the CC could incorporate more information about what each department does and how the departments are intertwined with each other in the student experience.

Information Dissemination. One faculty member was frustrated with pass/fail system, as they stated that this option was only available for one semester, which tremendously disadvantaged students because they had not fully recovered from the COVID pandemic:

> They did not continue that, even this semester. And what I am seeing is, this semester, students are worse off. I think they were running on reserves last semester and I mean mental, health and economic reserves, and now they've run out of all three. And now when they need it most, we're pulling that carpet out

> from under them… Sadly, the higher up you get, the further removed from students you are.

However, in December 2020 – well before this interview took place – the CCCS updated BP-980 and SP 9-90A to make the pass/fail grading option permanent. Therefore, although pass/fail was an option for students, this faculty member was not aware of the option, highlighting the lack of communication filters between administrators and student-facing employees.

Similarly, many student-facing employee participants stated that they were frustrated as they felt that the CCCS made decisions without consulting them or determining how these decisions would affect students' ability to be successful in classes. In fact, several participants joked that the reason that both CCCS or campus administration rarely asks student-facing staff and faculty before making decisions is because there is a preconceived notion that faculty "always think they know best". As one participant stated:

> We have also talked about what the policies are, but what are the practices of the people on the ground working with students? Because sometimes there's a big disconnect. The higher you go, the less you actually work with students… I mean, I get the process, and sometimes it's not a bunch of academic advisors getting together saying, 'hey, we should have this policy'...

However, the CCCS does take faculty, staff and student feedback into consideration before making decisions regarding policies or procedures. BP 2-30; the State Faculty Advisory Council and Faculty Shared Governance and BP 4-25 State Student Advisory Council are policies designed to gather input from faculty and students. The faculty members vote on Council members, and those members then represent the faculty or student body, respectively, when discussing policy changes. Although this faculty member may not personally be asked about the policy changes, faculty members and students are consulted prior to changes being made. This again highlights the breakdown in communication between administrators and student-facing employees and the need for changes to ensure that all employees fully understand the privileges their role entails.

Theme 2: Issues with Written Communication. The second overarching theme I identified was issues with written communication. The participants reported frequently experiencing difficulty understanding the language in the CCCS policies, which has led to confusion about what the policy is actually stating.

As one Senior CC Administration participant stated:

> What gets really tricky within [policies] is that we're usually trying to even understand a policy as it relates to operation of a daily activity… and so policy for policy sake is difficult to necessarily just apply and with no specific circumstance around it.

The participants in Administration all agreed that the language in the CCCS policies can be difficult to discern and then apply at the college level; in fact, several participants noted that the language in the CCCS policies contained a fair amount of jargon and vocabulary that made it difficult to understand even for someone with multiple degrees with ample experience in higher education. One CC Administration participant noted:

> We definitely talk and argue in the [Administration] group about, 'What does this mean? And how are they interpreting it?' Definitely not everything is clear cut. We had to talk about how we wanted to interpret it at [the CC].

Participants also noted that many of the CCCS policies were outdated. While the CCCS reviews policies every five years, the CCCS generally only reviews the policies that are more commonly used. For example, when I asked about the policy that allows the college president to make exceptions to allow students to audit a class, the President remarked:

> It's never been interpreted as far as I know in the system that the college president could say 'if you're registered for one course, you can audit a second'... I haven't read that policy in maybe 15 years… I would say that the language of the policy is really bad. It doesn't define what the circumstances are, or why it would be that way; it's not clear to me what the purpose of that was even for.

Therefore, it can be difficult for college administrators to discern the purpose of a policy that was enacted in the first place.

Student of Concern Form. One form of written communication frequently mentioned by participants as problematic was the use of the "Student of Concern" form, but several participants noted issues with the form and the resulting outcomes. If a faculty or staff member learns that a student was experiencing challenges, such as housing or food insecurity, they can submit a Student of Concern form. When asked about what resources the college provided to help PT students or students struggling with economic instability, every single participant brought up the Student of Concern form. Accordingly, the faculty or staff member may submit the form, which is then supposed to be sent to a team of relevant staff members who can address the issue by contacting the student and providing them with resources corresponding to their needs. Consequently, the faculty and staff have little knowledge regarding what resources are available to the student for the need the student is experiencing. Instead of helping the student, the faculty or staff member would simply submit the form and assume the student received support. After following up with the students for which they submitted a Student of Concern form, many of the participants found that the student was never contacted. Therefore, many of the students' issues remained unresolved, or were exacerbated by the false hope for help that was never provided. Regarding the Student of Concern form, one faculty member stated:

> Honestly, it kind of goes into a black hole. We've heard from many students that we've filled out the form that they were never contacted. So we have very low confidence in the system. I fill them out because I want to give every possible chance for the student to get help, but I also try to give the students numbers that I know work. The problem is that I don't have many resources to provide to the student… I feel like I could do more if I knew more.

The faculty member believes that if they had better information regarding resources they could provide to the student, they could better support students.

The CC is in the process of trying to streamline this process by creating and implementing the Single Stop Project. This is a database that houses current extra-curricular resources, such as housing and food benefits. The plan is that once the database is complete, the CC will hire a coordinator that will oversee providing the information on resources to the students. However, this new process does not change the faculty members' concerns in that the student facing employees will still be required to submit a student of concern form, and then the employee must simply trust that the students is being helped rather than being able to provide the resources directly to the student.

Theme 3: Communication with Students. The third theme I identified from the interviews involved lack of communication or miscommunication with students at different points throughout the students' academic trajectory. The identified issues in student communication centered around communication shared with students during orientation, advising, and in classrooms.

Orientation. As previously mentioned, the disconnect between departments can end up negatively impacting students' ability to successfully complete their program. Some participants reported that during orientation, how staff members discussed financial aid lacked detail about what students might expect. As one participant in the financial aid office shared:

> I think sometimes [Admissions & Outreach] approach orientation from a 'we want them in, have them attend' position and sound exciting and positive. But there's also some reality to the fact that it is going to take a student five years to earn an Associate's degree if they are only attending part time, or that the students are going to have limitations on what they can actually receive, so how is that going to affect their ability to be successful in their programs?

Many participants agreed that there needs to be a better mechanism for communicating during orientation and throughout the students' programs on how student decisions will affect their future success.

Classrooms. The perception from the faculty that I interviewed was that the faculty department has tried to address the challenges surrounding communication with students in their classes with regard to situations like housing and food insecurity. The faculty sought to address this communication to students through updating their syllabi with the resources that are available such as the campus food pantry. Additionally, their syllabi now state that the faculty member is willing to listen if a student is struggling with any matter - though, as previously discussed, much of the time, a Student of Concern form is submitted if students do speak with their instructors. Faculty members' attempts to support students are often lost on students, as most of the time, faculty members only become aware that a student is struggling after they have "ghosted", that is, they stop attending with no communication and indication of what was going on. One participant said, "We've had a lot of students who ghosted … and we've tried to reach out, and if we even get ahold of them, their answer is often, 'I just can't do it right now.'" Therefore, faculty participants reported a commitment to sharing information about available resources with students in their classes in the hopes of supporting students in being successful in their classes.

Advising. Advising sessions are another event during which communication with students is inadequate. When asked what was one thing that they would want to change in how their department operated, all advising participants agreed that they needed to be able to spend more time speaking with students, specifically learning their goals for earning the degree or certificate. As one advisor noted, "I think that would open the door to conversations that we may not be having with students, such as things related to their economic instability." Because of the format of Advising appointments - which tend to be transactional rather than relational - advisors had little time to discuss the personal situations of students and focus most of their time supporting students in choosing their classes in the pathway model. Advisors reported insufficient time to adequately communicate with the student and for the Advisors to set expectations for the student to be successful their classes.

Fiscal Restraints

The second overarching theme I identified from the data analysis focuses on the fiscal restraints the CC faces in being able to adequately support students. In this section, I break down the different situations where I identified the fiscal issues and discuss the participants' answers that fit within the theme. The themes relating to fiscal restraints include the inability to hire enough employees to address student needs and lack of available resources to address student needs.

Theme 4: Inability to Hire Enough Employees to Address Student Needs. The issue most participants cited related to financial constraints was the inability to hire enough employees to adequately address student needs. As previously noted, part of the reason the advising department focuses on a more transactional advising appointment with students is because they do not have enough Advisors to spend quality time with the students and have deeper conversations. As one participant in the advising department shared:

> We're so broad. When we get so broad, you can get lost in the shuffle a little bit. We do have advisors that advise for specific career and academic communities… but still within that, advisors will have several programs… But I think we can do so much more with less students, and so we just need more advisors.

Participants from the financial aid office and Faculty also expressed a similar concern over adequate staffing across offices that would improve their effectiveness. For example, there was only one employee in charge of the entire SAP and Professional

Judgement processes, which can be difficult considering that the CC enrolls thousands of students. According to one participant in the administration department, only nine percent of the current budget goes toward all of higher education in the state, with an even smaller portion that goes to the CCCS that must be disseminated to the 13 colleges within the system. Therefore, the funds are not available to hire more individuals, even though doing so would likely have a positive effect on the ability of staff to support students to be successful in their programs.

Theme 5: Lack of Available Resources to Address Student Needs

Time. When asked what changes they would like to see with how the college supports PT students and students dealing with economic instability, several participants stated that they wanted to review the CC policies that respond to the CCCS policies - referred to as Organizational Guidelines at the CC - to determine if they were having the intended effect on students, or if certain demographics were being adversely affected. Although this review request was partly to focus on equity and inclusion, the participants agreed that PT students and students dealing with economic instability should also be considered in reviewing the organizational guidelines. When I raised the idea of reviewing policies, the president reacted by stating:

> Yeah, I think this would be a great idea. But I think it's really about then, who's going to do it? The hard part in an organization like this is the number of people who say, 'hey, we should do this, but I'm too busy.'

The president then continues on to say that before CC could focus on the CC policies, it was more important to look at the following issues: how the faculty members are teaching and whether physical environments are welcoming to students across racial groups. Additionally, although the CC has started the process of reviewing the policies, faculty teaching and physical environments, this process is proceeding slowly due to competing demands on the time of the Administrators at the CC. As one senior level administrative participant stated, “I think that's the curse, I suppose, of higher education, is that you have so many ideas, but then you don't have the time to ever really put them into practice.”

Programmatic and Tuition Restraints. Participants in administration advised the reason several academic support programs are not available on all the campuses is due to the lack of funding for the programs. For example, the Adult Education Center is only available on one campus because it is fully funded through a partnership with a local business. If the business elected not to fund the program, it would effectively cease to exist. The Vice President of one of the campuses stated:

> The fiscal realities are real. We’re funded primarily by tuition, but over 70% of that revenue goes toward the cost of personnel, and the rest essentially has to go to upkeep of buildings, so there is relatively very little funding available for funding specific programs. I think it’s really important for community colleges to find ways to also bring along community members who want to provide gifts so support our mission with philanthropic efforts… I think that the team of partners of our community are so key because a lot of times we will be stronger partners together.

Without community support, participants reported that many programs would be unfunded and cease to continue.

Similarly, some students can receive financial aid in the form of scholarships through the support of philanthropic community members. One participant stated, “Even during the pandemic, we had a donor who came alongside and said, ‘I really believe in what our licensed practical nursing students are doing, so I am going to pay their tuition for this year and next’.” The participants in the administration believed that having these programs were a benefit to the students and would prefer that these programs could be offered at all of the campuses, but short of philanthropic gifts, the programs and other scholarships are not able to be continued at multiple campuses.

Summary

The CCCS policy analysis, documentary data, and interviews explore how CC implements the CCCS policies that affect PT students and students dealing with economic instability. This information in conjunction with the supporting themes inform the recommendations provided in the next chapter. These recommendations will be divided into recommendations made explicitly to the CCCS regarding their overall policies and recommendations made to the CC in hopes they will be considered to help PT students and students experiencing economic instability to be successful in classes and throughout their program.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

The focus of this study was to determine how CCCS policies implemented at a community college within the system affected PT students and students experiencing economic instability. In order to research this topic, the study was guided by these questions:

RQ1: What Colorado Community College System (CCCS) policies are in place that affect Post-Traditional students and students facing economic instability?

a. What is the focus - academic or financial - of these policies?

RQ2: How did one community college within the system implement those policies across campus, within individual departments, and in the classroom?

RQ3: How does the implementation of policies at the individual college level affect the ability of Post-Traditional students and students dealing with economic instability to be successful within the classroom?

Before discussing the recommendations based on the data collected, it is important to thoroughly answer the research questions. Therefore, this section will answer each of the research questions. In this section, I will also reflect on how the findings relate to prior research. Then, the subsequent sections will discuss recommendations, which will be split into two categories: recommendations to the CCCS, and recommendations to the CC. The final section will discuss the implications that the study highlights and the opportunities for future research.

Discussion

This research study uncovered many interesting findings about the CCCS system policies that affect PT students and students dealing with economic instability, how a CC within the CCCS system interpreted and implemented those policies, and the effect on the ability of those students populations to be successful in the classroom and in their programs. The overarching finding was that there were very little targeted policies for these populations, nor were there many targeted interventions for these student populations at the CC level. In the sections that follow, I answer each research question.

Research Question One

What Colorado Community College System (CCCS) policies are in place that affect Post-Traditional students and students facing economic instability?

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the CCCS policies to determine which of those policies affect both PT students and students facing economic instability. Out of all 196 policies that are currently governing the CCCS - that is, not including the archived policies that no longer apply - only 78 specifically address students. The remaining 118 address aspects of organizational structure within the system, college personnel, cyber security, internal audit procedures, fiscal procedures for the administration side of the system, and building and grounds maintenance (Policies and Procedures, 2021).

Using the Holsti model of content analysis (Holsti, 1969), I found that of the remaining 78, only 15 policies could apply directly to PT students or students dealing with economic instability. Additionally, another nine policies could indirectly apply to PT students or students dealing with economic instability, such as Board Policy (BP) and System Procedure (SP) 9-41, which address how developmental education should be handled; not all PT students or students dealing with economic instability need to take developmental education or remedial courses. Although not directly focused on these student demographics, these policies can still affect students in that are required to take the classes, considering that developmental courses are not eligible for financial aid, meaning that students must pay out of pocket for the classes.

However, in viewing the CCCS policies from the lens of the conceptual framework, it appeared that none of the CCCS policies were directed explicitly toward PT students or students dealing with economic instability. Rather, any and all policies were generalized to apply to all students, not just specific demographics. This is in line with the Principal Agent Theory, in which the governing body must provide general enough guidance to be able to be applied to any institution within the body.

Although none of the policies explicitly focused on one particular student demographic, the effect of the policies could have a greater overall effect on PT students and students dealing with economic instability. From the interviews, the participants all noted that PT students tend to be more focused and go to school with a specific goal in mind. PT students tend to differ from students that took the more traditional route and attended college right after high school, and tend to not be as motivated and may have attended college. Because attending college directly after graduating high school may be just the next step for students just graduating high school, the level of stakes for the student is not quite as high. Likewise, the stakes for students dealing with economic instability tend to be more significant than for students that are not struggling financially. Therefore, these 24 policies do have a large effect on both of these student demographics.

This phenomenon of PT students and students dealing with economic instability being more motivated can be explained by the theory of motivation (Maslow, 1943). Students that have either just graduated high school or are not experiencing economic instability may be more likely to have their basic needs met. Thus the need to earn a college degree to be able to provide for themselves or their families is not as pressing as someone that has additional dependents or is experiencing economic instability that needs a degree or certificate to earn a better living.

Research Question One Part A

What is the focus - academic or financial - of these policies? The number of the policies that apply to PT students and students dealing with economic instability is fairly equally focused between the financial area and academic area; however, many of the academic policies have a significant impact on financial aspect of the college experience – being able to receive financial aid to pay for tuition and fees. For example, SP 4-20d Satisfactory Academic Progress for financial aid, where a student must meet certain academic criteria in order to maintain financial aid eligibility. Out of the narrowed 24 policies found to affect PT students and students dealing with economic instability, 14 focused on the academic domain, while 10 applied to the financial sphere. Neoliberal Theory suggests that this is due in part to the necessity for measure application and performance indicators (Olssen & Peters, 2007); a student must be able to show they meet certain requirements in order to receive the benefit of financial aid support.

Research Question Two

How did one community college within the system implement those policies; as a whole, within individual departments, and in the classroom?

The CCCS is a system of 13 community colleges, and each school has a unique demographic makeup with different needs. To limit the breadth of the study, I focused on one community college within the system. By focusing on college within the system, it gives a control group - a sample set - out of the larger CCCS body to make sure that the data from the interviews are clear and concise about how individual schools address CCCS policies. However, the college that I chose has multiple campuses, and each of the campuses has a slightly different student demographic, so it was favorable to be able to apply recommendations to the schools within the broader system.

Principal-Agent Theory can explain the structure of the CCCS system (Laffont & Martimort, 2002). The CCCS must create policies that can apply equally to each of the 13 colleges throughout the system. Because each college serves a different community - thus different demographics - the policies must be very broad and generalized. The individual colleges, then, interpret and implement the policies based on their populations' needs. Likewise, the separate campuses working autonomously models the Principal-Agent Theory in that each campus serves a slightly different population. While each campus does report to the larger college, the campuses need to be able to mold policies, procedures, and programs to meet the needs of their individual student community. Therefore, the approach to how the individual campuses implement those policies and procedures, and what programs or classes the campuses offer will vary.

The Community College that I chose functions almost like a smaller version of the CCCS system, with the Administration dictating organizational guidance for the entire college, but each of the campuses maintaining autonomy to focus on the needs of their individual student populations. Therefore, each of the campuses had different programs and services available to students. For example, one campus had an Adult Education Center, where adults could attend to get help with ESL classes and GED prep - these services were not available at other campuses or for students outside the immediate service area of the campus.

Some departments of the college are considered college-wide - meaning they work with all students regardless of the campus - such as the financial aid office. Other departments are campus-based - these departments have separate divisions at each of the campuses, such as academic advising and faculty. Therefore, implementation of the CCCS policies may look different depending on what department - or even what campus – being examined. For example, the advising departments follow the Pathways Advising model, so they have a particular cohort of students that each advisor supports, whereas the financial aid office runs processes college-wide and has counseling sessions on a first come first served basis rather than a case management style.

Within the classrooms, the policy implementation varies just as greatly, as each department I examined for this study - English, math, science, etc. - dictate their own procedures. For example, BP 9-80 and SP 9-80a govern the academic standards and practices for grading and assigning grades; however, outside of the standard A-F letter grading policy, each department - and really each individual instructor - can mold their classrooms however they wish with very little oversight. Some faculty members choose to have their entire class point system based on exams, while others choose to have several smaller assignments to scaffold the learning with exams as a comprehensive review. This is also true of remediation and developmental education - SP 9-41, Assessment for College Readiness - where some departments have created a studio lab taken in conjunction with the regular college level courses that serves as a remediation or developmental education while still receiving credit for their classes, whereas other professors utilize differentiated instruction to accommodate the different learning ability levels of the students within the classrooms.

How each individual campus and department implements the CCCS policies can be viewed through the lens of the conceptual framework of motivation (Maslow, 1943; Herzberg, 1959; Harrigan & Lamport-Commons, 2015). Because the students have mitigating situations that determine how they respond to certain situations, each department must make accommodations within the CCCS policies to account for the different circumstances that the students face. For example, the financial aid office must consider a student's plan for success when determining whether they will be approved for Satisfactory Academic Progress and regain eligibility for financial aid. The advising department needs to be mindful of the student's background when advising on classes, such as if the student has other obligations outside of school like working full time or providing for a family. Likewise, the faculty must also be aware of the ability levels of the students in their classroom to know how to approach the teaching of information with each student to maximize the potential for the student to learn the information. The overgeneralization of the CCCS policies allows the departments to maintain flexibility to help different demographics of students by allowing them to be more aware of the student's motivation for going to school, thus increasing the likelihood the student can be successful. However, this flexibility also can end up having different effects on the abilities for PT students and students dealing with economic instability to be successful in their classes, and potentially their degree or certificate programs.

Research Question Three

How does the implementation of policies at the individual college level on the ability of Post-Traditional students and students dealing with economic instability to be successful within the classroom?

In reviewing interview data, it became clear that PT students and students dealing with economic instability present a wide array of outcomes within the classroom, for a wide variety of reasons. Using Principal-Agent Theory to explain why the CCCS policies are so broad, that broadness allows the departments and faculty at the individual community college to be able to form their own procedures while attempting to help the students enrolled in their classes. However, the downside to the policies being so overgeneralized is that there are no targeted supports for specific student demographics, so colleges may not have the resources to adequately help these students be successful, as those resources have been allocated to the total student population rather than targeted interventions.

Furthermore, using both Principal-Agent Theory and Neoliberal Theory, we can see how college-wide departments, such as financial aid, tend to see the impact of policy implementation on the ability of PT students and students dealing with economic instability after the fact. In order for the CC to continue being able to receive federal financial aid funds or to continue having regional accreditation for their degree and certificate programs, the CC must report their metrics – a neoliberal foundation - to several different agencies, from loan data to the National Student Loan Database System (NSLDS) to programmatic information to the regional accreditation boards showing the programs still meet requirement (Whistle, 2017). If the CC – the agent in this case - does not report these metrics to the federal government – the Principal - by a certain time frame or does not meet the requirements sent by the governmental institutions, the CC can run the risk of losing their accreditation or ability to disburse federal financial aid. This requirement to report data in a certain timeframe can end up affecting students and their ability to be successful in classes. For example, the SAP process that determines if the student maintains eligibility for financial aid is run after the semester ends, meaning the financial aid department does not see the results and does not start receiving SAP appeals until after the process has been completed.

Because the financial aid department oversees services to the entire student population, they do not have the time nor the resources to follow students individually, meaning that employees in the financial aid department do not know what students are going to be on SAP and not be eligible for financial aid until after the process runs at the end of the semester. The faculty and advising departments - the campus-based departments - on the other hand, can see the impact of the policies on students on a more real time, individual basis. The advisors can see how students are doing in their classes, and the participants said that a majority of the students reach out to the advisors when they are experiencing some sort of issue in hopes that the advisor will be able to help them address the issue. The faculty members utilize different techniques, such as reaching out to the students when they are falling behind in classes, creating appointments and having open office hours, etc. in order to determine how best to help the student. These student interactions between the advising department or the faculty can be explained by the Theory of Motivation (Maslow, 1943; Herzberg, 1959; Harrigan & Lamport-Commons, 2015). Because the students' basic needs are not being met - that is they are not focusing on being a "student first", as one participant stated, to take care of other issues outside of class - they are not motivated to be successful in their classes; however, the students know they need to be successful in classes in order to be able to remove themselves from their current situation, so they may reach out to their advisors to see if they can help alleviate the issue so the student can still be successful in class.

Unfortunately for both the campus-based and college-wide departments, because the policies are not specific to either PT students or students dealing with economic instability - the downside of the Principal-Agent Theory aspect of having a broad policies to apply to the most students within the system- such as not having specific scholarship categories available for either demographic, students can and do end up having to withdraw or failing their classes. When this happens, there is not much the college can do because they are bound by other CCCS policies, as the student is required to go through the R2T4 process and could end up owing money, could end up on SAP and be ineligible for financial aid, or perhaps even withdraw from school altogether.

Although the CCCS policies were designed to be broad in order to serve the most students within the system as possible, they still do affect the students' ability to be successful in classes, or perhaps their ability to be successful in their programs. Given the data collected from the participants in multiple departments at the CC, I believe that I can make some recommendations that could help shift some of the policies at the CCCS better help these demographics of students, and to be able to help the CC implement better procedures to increase the likelihood for success within their classrooms and programs. The following section will address the interpretations and analysis from the evaluation data I collected.

Interpretation and Analysis

From previous literature, it is understood that students that both PT students and students dealing with economic instability tend to have a more difficult time being successful in their degree or certificate programs (PNPI, 2018). This phenomenon is also supported with the theory of motivation, which states that students tend to have a more difficult - but not impossible - time reaching higher levels of the needs hierarchy if more basic needs are not met or if they have more responsibilities that prevent them from reaching the higher levels (Maslow, 1943; Herzberg, 1959; Harrigan & Lamport-Commons, 2015). Given the data collected from the interviews, it appears that this phenomenon is present at the CC as well. Given what we know about how PT students and students facing economic instability tend to struggle, it was perhaps a surprise that the CCCS - and by extension the CC - does not have more resources, policies, and procedures in place to be able to help these populations succeed. In some ways, these findings echoed previous literature, (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Stanley, 2014; Gross, et al., 2015), which contend that policies are often not enough to help community college students, so colleges need to change how it approaches the student experience to increase the likelihood for success, such as instituting a more rigorous advising model, reducing, or eliminating remediation - DevEd - classes in the college, restructuring financial aid allotment toward need-based aid rather than merit based awards.

My findings from the study differ from previous studies in other ways, due to the unique structure of the CC and individual campuses in relation to their overall placement in the CCCS system. The campuses not only have to contend with the federal and state regulations that normally contribute to policy and procedure at the community college, but the campuses also have to contend with the CCCS policies and the overall organizational guidance of the CC itself. I did not find any studies regarding community colleges with a similar unique structure and reporting mechanism. Therefore, while the previous studies regarding student success and student demographics - even within community college - may be similar to the demographics and outcomes at CC, the structure creates a unique experience that has not yet been widely studied.

The results from the evaluations suggest that it is not for lack of trying or a lack of empathy or compassion for these students' situations. In fact, the majority of participants wanted it to be made evident that their goal was for the students that they interact with to succeed. However, the participants believe that their hands are metaphorically tied in a plethora of areas that make it difficult to help these student demographics to the fullest extent possible.

Some of these issues preventing help are not easily changed, such as federal or state financial aid laws, but some issues result from the approach of the CCCS in policy creation or from the CC due to their interpretations and resulting organizational guidance. According to the participants, changing certain aspects of the CCCS policies as well the interpretation of the policies at the individual college level - including CC organizational philosophies - could better help PT students and students dealing with economic instability to be successful in their classes and throughout their programs. This next section will discuss the implications and recommendations for both the CCCS and the CC identified from the data.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings from my evaluation create implications for policy and practice for both the CCCS and the CC, for which I would like to offer recommendations. Federal Title IV regulations are based primarily on the neoliberal need for metrics and standards - students must meet certain metrics such as receiving at least a 2.0 Grade Point Average and not going into default on borrowed loans, and colleges by extension must meet certain metrics such as graduation rates and loan default rates in order to be Title IV eligible (Olssen & Peters, 2007). Students that fall short of these set standards run the risk of not being able to use Title IV - or institutional or state aid - to pay for their classes. The CCCS and the CC need to have systems in place for students to be able to work within the neoliberal federal system to help them meet those metrics and standards. From the themes discussed in the previous chapter, these shortcomings fall mainly into the two categories of communication and financial restraints. Therefore, my recommendations of both policy and practice highlight the areas in which changes in these two areas can be made to positively affect the ability for PT students and students experiencing economic instability to be successful in classes.

Policy

Recommendation 1: Rewrite CCCS Policies Using Jargon-Free, Understandable Language. In several of the interviews, for each of the questions specifically addressing a CCCS policy, I read a portion of the policy verbatim to the participant and asked them how they interpreted the information. In almost every circumstance, the participant had difficulty even understanding the language of the policy, much less what it meant or how to apply it to the CC. Additionally, I discussed at length with several participants in CC Administration how they had to debate and discuss the language of new or updated policies when determining how to create or update organizational guidance around the new language. In fact, the participants routinely had to contact other schools within the system to determine how they interpreted the policy language before determining how to interpret the language for the CC. Unfortunately, the participants also found that many other colleges interpret the information differently making their organizational guidelines are also inherently different. Having different policies throughout the system could create an issue where similar student demographics are receiving different resources or producing different outcomes despite being in the same system.

Therefore, the recommendation for the CCCS is to reexamine the language used in their policies and change the language or rewrite the policies to ensure they are easy to understand and free of Higher Education specific jargon. Doing so would allow for more uniformity with how the different colleges within the system interpret and implement the policies on their own campus. As an extension, therefore, students within the system have similar outcomes, which would be beneficial for the CCCS to more easily determine whether making changes in policy was effective system wide. Currently, outcomes for students can be drastically different simply because the individual college policies are drastically different as a result of different interpretations. Therefore, creating policies using jargon-free understandable language would increase the likelihood that the interpretations - and by extension the resulting policies - would be similar at different institutions, which would also increase the likelihood for similar outcomes for students at different institutions. If similar student demographics were more likely to have similar outcomes, the data collected would show a more comprehensive picture as to the effectiveness of the policy or program.

Ensure Information Dissemination to All Applicable Employees When Changes to Policy Are Made. The two examples of faculty members being unaware of both the pass/fail policy being made permanent and that the faculty senate had input in policy changes at the system level highlight the need to ensure that employees that are affected by policy changes must be made aware of them to be able to properly guide and advise students. This can be done by department heads and other managers that can not only give the information to their employees but also present it in a way that can help them understand why the change occurred and how specifically the change affects them. In order for successful information dissemination to occur, it will be important for the policies to be jargon-free and understandable so that those managers and department heads can correctly advise their employees.

Recommendation 2: Review Data Outcomes from CCCS to Determine Whether an Additional Scholarship Category Would be Financially Prudent. As mentioned in the previous chapter, both the CCCS and by extension the colleges within the system have tremendous fiscal limitations that potentially impede the progress of students. These fiscal limitations are due to decreased governmental funding as a result of the neoliberal “student as customer” view (Mintz, 2021, p.1). Following the idea of supply and demand, businesses require a higher education, which increases the demand for a higher education; as a result of the increased demand, education becomes a commodity, so the government determines that students should seek to pay for that commodity – higher education – on their own, thus funding is cut for higher education assistance. As the federal and state governments continue to cut funding, colleges lose the ability to adequately support their students due to understaffing, lack of funding for internal aid, inability to provide supportive programs. Therefore, the system and the schools within the system must navigate the question of how to increase the ability of students to be successful in their classes and programs without substantially raising the cost of those classes.

One way the system has addressed this for certain populations. is with scholarship categories. These scholarship categories include providing a tuition credit of up to 50% off the cost of tuition for senior citizens, discounted tuition for state employees attending classified training programs, farm/ranch management and small business assistance scholarships, and residence hall scholarships for students living on campus (Tuition and Fees, 2021). These student populations are able to receive a discount in tuition or scholarships to help with the overall cost of tuition. However, students that do not fit into one of these four categories are still required to pay the full tuition amount.

Therefore, I recommend that the CCCS review data outcomes such as the percentage of different student demographics that have withdrawn within 25% of completing their degree or certificate programs to determine if an additional category for scholarships for either PT students or students dealing with economic instability would be financially prudent. As several participants pointed out, though, a large proportion of the student population at the CC are considered PT students, and prior research suggests that over 50% of community students could be considered as having economic instability (Goldrick-Rab, et al., 2017). Therefore, I recommend a more targeted approach with any potential scholarships to minimize the fiscal impact on the college while simultaneously encouraging PT students and students dealing with economic instability to successfully complete their programs. Instead of a blanket scholarship, which would greatly affect the revenue brought into the system, the CCCS could consider examining the current data to determine if giving students within a certain amount of credits - such as students who have completed 45 out of 60 credits for a degree program - could receive a scholarship to help the student complete their last few credits. One participant in the CC administration believed implementing a targeted scholarship may help to increase the overall outcome measures reported to IPEDS without significantly affecting the overall budget. However, it is important to note that this is only a recommendation to review the current data to determine if it would be a reasonable change to the policy. As the President had stated, any change in funding would mean having to find cuts in funding elsewhere to be able to afford those changes. As such, creating a new scholarship category would require funding to be cut from other programs to be able to afford the new program. However, by reviewing the data, the CCCS could determine the breadth of the new scholarship - how many students would qualify - and the overall cost of a new scholarship category. This would allow the CCCS to determine if the benefits of the scholarship category would outweigh the impact of cutting funding to other funding allocations.

Recommendation 3: Redesign the Workplace Literacy Program Policy to Allow for Certifications or Classes for Credit with Businesses. The current policy defines Workplace Literacy Programs as a program that provides basic literacy courses - such as English as a Second Language or DevEd classes "for the benefit of the employees" (Workplace Literacy, 2021). As a result of the neoliberal shift in funding from the state and local governments (Mintz, 2021), it is difficult for the CCCS and the

CC to create programs and resources that students can utilize to help them successfully complete their programs without drastically altering the funding for other areas. This has been shown with the programs at the different campuses at the CC, where some programs - such as the Adult Learning Center - are not offered at other campuses due to the lack of fiscal resources. In fact, the only reason the Adult Learning Center exists is because it is fully sponsored by a business. As one participant stated, philanthropy is one of the best ways outside of tuition to create revenue for the college; however, many businesses do not partake because there is no benefit to them.

As the policy currently stands, a workplace literacy program is a smaller partnership with a business to have basic literacy classes taught to employees such as English Language Learning employees, for example. Unfortunately, this is not a very beneficial relationship, as it does not generate much revenue for the college due to the students finishing the ELL program and then continue working and not taking any community college classes. As a result, according to the president of the CC, they have not had a workplace literacy program at the CC - or more specifically partnering with a business - for several decades.

One way to address the fiscal limitations while increasing the resources for students is through mutually beneficial programs between businesses and the colleges. Therefore, I recommend that the CCCS redesign the Workplace Literacy Program policy to also allow employees to receive college credit through experiential learning that can be applied toward the completion of a degree or certificate program. Although there has not been a specific workplace literacy program in over 30 years, the CC has a state-of-the-art program that partners with the Department of Transportation, where students are able to earn experiential credit while doing their job. This is mutually beneficial for the CC and for the business in that the CC earns revenue from business paying for the course credits, while the business's employees can become certified for their employment.

This change that I am recommending is similar to the workforce development partnerships mentioned in previous chapters; however, the credits the students receive are not specific to the business. The change that I am suggesting would allow the credits the students receive to apply toward a degree or certificate program, thus the students could use the education received at any place of employment, rather than a workplace development program where the program provides training that can only be used in one industry (Mollenkopf-Pigsley, 2015). The students can obtain credits by demonstrating that they meet the class standards through their experience. Therefore, the recommendation to redesign the workplace literacy program policy - as the workforce literacy programs were not widely utilized - to a policy focused on business partnerships for student experiential learning, in which I believe businesses would be more inclined to partake because the credits would be a metric for showing competency in skills necessary for employment competency - a neoliberal principal (Olssen & Peters, 2007).

Recommendation 4: Review Policies (CCCS) and Organizational Guidelines (CC) to Determine Whether They Have the Intended Impact on Students. In a current social climate where equity and inclusion are at the forefront, it is extremely important to examine policies from an equity and inclusion lens to determine whether or not a particular policy or guideline is having the intended impact on the students, or whether particular student demographics are being negatively impacted as a result of the policies or guidelines. Unfortunately, I determined from the data that this is not currently happening at either the CCCS level with their policies, or with the CC organizational guidelines; or if they are, it is happening at a very slow pace because this is not a high priority.

As a result, students may be negatively impacted. For example, the CCCS COF policy states that only five percent of the eligible undergraduate students enrolled in the state institution are eligible to receive a COF waiver to be able to receive the COF for longer than the 150% timeframe allowed. Considering that the majority of students fall into the Post-Traditional category at the CC, there is a great likelihood that over five percent of the population would need this waiver. As another example, the current CC policy regarding transfer credits creates an issue for students hoping to transfer credits from other institutions. Instead of a single, streamlined credit transfer process, the students must also fill out a secondary form to have the credits evaluated. Unfortunately, many students are unaware of the secondary form requirement, leaving potential credits from being applied to their degree program and resulting in students having to take classes they do not need.

Additionally, there is a cost associated with both sending official transcripts from other colleges to CC as well as to submit the transfer evaluation form. If the credit does not transfer in, the student must then either take the class again or take a PLA exam to receive the credit for prior learning. The complex process, the waiting time, and the cost involved can all present a significant issue for both PT students and students dealing with economic instability, as any setback increases the likelihood the student will not be successful in their program. According to Megan Chase (2010), Europe faced a similar issue with creating courses that would guarantee transfer to multiple institutions in different countries and created a standard set of course outcomes to guarantee transfer called the Bologna Process. The CCCS has created a similar program for guaranteed transfer to baccalaureate granting institutions - called the Bridge to Bachelor Program - where credits are guaranteed to be transferred to any four-year public university in Colorado (Bridge to Bachelor, 2021). However, research indicates that existing policies do not address the reasons that students have difficulty with transferring credits, which include lack of resources in advising as well as student uncertainty with degree programs (Hodara et al., 2016). Hodara and associates (2016) recommend, among other suggestions, reviewing and redefining policies to help better focus undecided students in order that transfer credits are not lost because they do not fit into the degree program - thus wasting both time and money.

The CC President acknowledged that while reviewing policies and procedures with an equity lens is a very important thing to do, it is not a high priority because the CC do not have the manpower to be able to accomplish this. However, as one participant stated, this is an extremely important topic, and even though the employees are extremely busy, they need to find a way to make time to examine the policies and organizational guidelines from an equity and inclusion lens. Doing so would allow both the CCCS and the CC to find areas where different student demographics are disproportionately affected, which would allow them to adjust better serve all students. It is important to note, though, that this recommendation does not specifically have to do with PT students or students dealing with economic instability, but these populations would assuredly be positively impacted by reviewing the policies with an equity and inclusion lens.

Review Policies to Determine the Frequency for Policy Use to Ascertain if Revisions – or the Policies themselves – are Necessary. Because technology is changing at such a rapid pace, and society along with it, it is necessary to review policies for how frequently they are being used in practice at the community college level. Although the president noted that the CCCS seeks to review the policies every five years, as noted in Table 3 on page 75, many of the policies have not been reviewed in longer than the five-year time frame – some even as much as 20 years. As a result, policies that were appropriate for the student's demographics of the CCCS – even relatively recently – may no longer apply with the swift changes to societal norms and technological advances. Therefore, if a policy is found to not be utilized much, if any, the CCCS can consider revising the policy to ensure it can apply to the student population of today or completely repeal the policy if it is not being utilized. Likewise, if a policy is frequently utilized, the policy can be reviewed more frequently to ensure the continued impact on students is intentional.

Keep Fiscal Concerns in Mind when Reviewing CC Policies. Because the CC must balance being able to provide programs to help students succeed with being able to afford those programs, it is also important to keep the fiscal budget concerns in mind when reviewing policies and procedures at the CC level. If a program can be beneficial to the students but there is not room in the budget, it is important to see out other avenues of funding. As previously discussed, partnering with businesses can be one way to achieve both the funding and the programmatic needs.

Practice

Recommendation 5: Use Voluntary Framework of Accountability to Measure Outcomes Data. As a result of the changing workforce requirements to require performance indicators and outcome metrics to verify that an employee is able to successfully execute the job functions, the mission of higher education, including the mission of the community college, has also changed (Olssen & Peters, 2007; Mollenkopf-Pigsley, 2015) To navigate the neoliberal federal policies concerning higher education, colleges must report specific data outcomes to the government to determine whether they are effectively teaching the students. IPEDS currently reports the outcome measures of first-time, full-time and first-time, part-time students that graduate the community college with a degree or certificate within three years, as well as non-first-time full- and part-time students (Ashford, 2017). Colleges are also required to report on whether certificates or degrees were earned within six or eight years, and whether students have withdrawn or transferred if they have not graduated (Ashford, 2017). Because, the most recent IPEDS data displays is from the 2011-2012 academic year; the data is a decade behind, making the IPEDS data ineffective for use as a tool for determining the success of students within the institution.

As previously discussed, the community college is a dynamic organization with many different facets, and unfortunately these outcome measures reported to IPEDS do not encompass the full picture of the community college and its students. Therefore, my recommendation is for CC to join the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) in order to be able to get a more comprehensive view of the CC (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021). Unlike the IPEDS data, the VFA outcome measures “broaden and enhance understanding of early momentum data (VFA, n.d., p. 2)” - all disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, full and part time, general, Pell recipients, and even percentage of students in developmental education in order to allow the college to fine tune their organizational guidance and teaching policies to positively affect the outcomes of students at the CC. These outcome measures can be seen in table 4.

Table 4.

Key Performance Indicators for VFA

Credit Momentum KPIs
Students earning 6+ college credits in first term
Students earning 12+ college credits in first term
Students earning 15+ college credits in first year
Students earning 24+ college credits in first year
Students earning 30+ college credits in first year
Gateway Math and English Completion KPIs
Completed college math in year one
Completed college English in year one
Completed both college math and English in year one
Persistence KPIs

Persisted from term 1 into term 2
College course completion KPI
College-level course completion rate in students' first academic year

Although neoliberal policies can negatively affect students, using metrics as a tool to improve teaching and programs rather than using the metrics as a measure of success can be beneficial. For example, a faculty member may be able to rework their course material if they determine from the course exams that the students did not understand the information. Likewise, using the VFA as a tool to determine how effective programs, faculty members' teaching, policies affect different populations of students due to the disaggregation of data, would allow the CC to better target interventions and changes to organizational guidelines - that is CC specific policies - to better support the needs of specific student demographics, including PT students and students dealing with economic instability.

Recommendation 6: Incorporate Financial Aid into Every Student Interaction Starting from Orientation Forward. The participants identified financial issues as the far and away the number one reason that students were unsuccessful in their classes. Therefore, it stands to reason that financial aid should be a part of every student interaction - whether in orientation, advising sessions, or when students start classes - to ensure they understand exactly the financial burden that going to college is and to make sure that students have a specific plan of how they are going to pay for their college classes.

Unfortunately, financial aid being an integral part of the student experience is not currently the case at CC. Although the orientations give a broad overview, suggesting that scholarships are available and discuss the general idea that attending college costs money, orientations do not include information specific to financial aid that might address the very large metaphorical elephant in the room of the cost of college. Additionally, changing how student facing employees - whether academic advisors, financial aid professionals, or faculty members - present financial aid to the student would also open other avenues to advise students more holistically along their academic journey. For example, most adults are going to take longer than two years to complete an associate degree given that they are juggling multiple responsibilities. As such, advisors could then advise on the cost/benefit ratio of time versus cost to help the student decide what is in the student's best interest for the life of their academic journey at CC.

Therefore, my recommendation is for the financial aid office to be a significant part of every student interaction, from orientation when they are first accepted into the college, to registering for classes, to advising appointments, and even in the syllabi and classroom introductions when students start classes. By instilling in students a sense of the actual financial cost of attending school, the participants hope that the students will be more prudent in the classes that they take, as well as the decisions they make in the classes, such as if they are going to withdraw, because they will understand that there are potentially financial repercussions should they deviate from the plan they originally set forth.

Advising students on the financial aspects of college is important from the CC side as well due to the neoliberal nature of higher education. The CC needs students to successfully pass their classes and either matriculate into a four-year university or graduate from the CC program in order to continue to be able to receive Title IV funding, which can then help other students to afford their college tuition. If the number one reason for students to withdraw from classes or unsuccessfully complete classes is financial, I theorize that increasing the financial awareness and planning for students will also increase the likelihood for success in their classes and ultimately their programs, which will reflect positively on the outcome metrics presented to the government.

Recommendation 7: Explore a Hybrid Advising Model that Includes Financial Aid and Academic Advising. Unfortunately, having financial aid be a major part of conversations with students can be difficult because academic advisors often lack access to student financial aid information, which can be a major disservice to students, considering that financial aid and paying for college is one of - if not the biggest - reasons that students struggle and withdraw from classes. As it currently stands at CC, other offices outside of the financial aid office do not have access to the financial information for the students, so advisors are unable to fully advise students on how their decisions are going to affect their current and future financial situations. This can lead to the student feeling disjointed and misadvised and could potentially affect their ability to graduate in the future if they are no longer able to pay for the classes because of their financial aid status or if they have reached their aggregate limits. Additionally, many students may not understand the effect that withdrawing from classes has on their ability to receive aid or complete their programs in the future. A student may withdraw for a good reason, such as a financial issue or because of childcare, but the student will end up being charged for the incomplete classes.

Therefore, my recommendation is to explore a hybrid advising model, where the advisors can advise on both the academic side and the financial side. According to Felix and Griff (2019) similar programs - what they refer to as integrated services - integrated services at other institutions have seen results up to a 90% increase question resolution, a 10% increase in persistence, and a six percent in graduation rates. Therefore, data suggests implementing a new integrated advising model could increase overall student support and resulting outcomes.

As previously discussed, the advising department wants to be able to have more comprehensive advising appointments with their students; however, they are unable to do so because they do not have enough employees, and they lack access to the requisite information to be able to offer a more complete picture. Providing a hybrid model would address the fiscal limitations of the college, as the CC would not have to hire more individuals; rather they could repurpose some of the advisors in order that they become a part of the hybrid model. Additionally, the hybrid model would allow a better bridge between the two silos of financial aid and advising, and the hybrid model would essentially have a foot in both worlds, which could lead to improved communication between the departments. Finally, the students would also benefit due to them being able to have a more complete advising appointment to be able to not only discuss issues within the classes, but also how their decisions would affect their finances, both now and in the future.

The advisors could inform students of the financial aid implications of withdrawing from a class, or that the student would have to pay any outstanding balance out of pocket in order to register for upcoming semesters because a balance would cause a hold preventing registration, which is what happens if a student withdraws from their classes. Then, the advisor would be able to advise the students on other strategies to help them pass the classes in order that it would not negatively affect the students' progress. In fact, it would help the student to have a clearer and more concise picture of their academic career so they could also start making more informed decisions for the future. Or, for example, the Advisor could determine the charges for a certain number of credits, and how much aid a student would receive. This would also allow the student to determine if they had enough funds - and enough time - to take another class, or if it were better to take a smaller amount of credits to allow for a refund after the balance was taken care of to help subsidize their income while they are attending classes, thus allowing the student to have more control over where a student may land with regard to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Changing the current structure of advising to allow for both financial and academic advising to students would require some changes in training as well. As one financial aid participant previously stated, a new employee goes through two separate new employee orientations: one orientation for the general employment information and one orientation for the specialized training, such as financial aid information. Therefore, to accommodate the new hybrid advising model, a new employment orientation should also be instated, where the advisors would receive both academic as well as financial induction. The new orientation method would not only allow the advisors to receive the necessary training to correctly advise students but it could also help to reduce the current department becoming siloed, as advisors would be able to more fully understand the process of what other departments do and how those interactions with students affect their own departments' student interactions.

Recommendation 8: Change in Single Stop Project Process to Include Multiple Student Facing Employees - Including Faculty. For students experiencing economic insecurity, the CC does not currently have a system that is seen as beneficial by all stakeholders. Many participants felt that the student concern forms that they submitted on the students' behalf were never addressed – several students told the faculty members that they were never contacted – thus preventing students from accessing resources that they need to be successful in their classes. Therefore, if faculty and staff do not trust that the students are going to be helped, they are not going to use the form.

The CC has attempted to rectify this by creating the Single Stop Project, where one Single Stop Project Coordinator will maintain a database of institutional, community, state, and federal resources for students. The plan was similar to the current student concern form, where the student-facing staff would refer the student to the Coordinator for resources.

However, my recommendation is to change the philosophy of how the student of concern form operates to allow all student facing staff and faculty access to the resource information through which they can provide directly to the student. Many participants expressed concern about being unable to help the student that they had developed a relationship with outside of submitting a form. Therefore, I recommend allowing these individuals to have access to the Single Stop database where the resources are housed in order to personally give the students the resources they need, and then reporting to the Coordinator the resources that they provided the student so the Coordinator could follow up to ensure the student was pursuing them. One benefit of changing how the Single Stop Project works is that it would allow the relationship between the student and employee to deepen, not only because it could allow them to have more difficult conversations with them in the hopes of seeing them succeed in their classes, but also on a more basic level, the employee would know for sure that the student was presented with the resources they need rather than simply submitting a form and hoping the student was contacted. Additionally, it would free up more time for the Coordinator because they would not have to probe the student on what the issue is and what resources would be most appropriate. Being able to more quickly provide information on resources to the student - which can sometimes mean the difference between life and death, depending on the students' needs - could allow the student to utilize the resources mire quickly as well.

However, prior to when the One Stop Shop implementation occurs, the CC will still be utilizing the Student of Concern form. Therefore, it is important to also increase trust in the process to ensure that the faculty and staff will be more willing to utilize the services, which is ultimately in the best interest of students. The contact that I spoke with suggested that all Student of Concern forms are acted on, so I theorize that the faculty or staff members were simply not made aware that the forms were acted on; for those students that stated they did not get contacted, it is possible that the CARE Team- those that review and work with the student regarding the form - was simply unable to reach them despite their attempts. One way to increase the trust in and transparency with the process is for the CARE Team keep the staff or faculty member that submitted the form apprised of where they are with contacting the student. There may be concern about FERPA; however, simply letting the faculty or staff member know that they have received the form and their steps for getting in contact with the student would not violate FERPA because no personal information was discussed. In fact, this may actually help to increase the likelihood that the CARE Team is able to reach the students, because if the CARE Team member is unsuccessful in reaching the student, the faculty or staff member that is in regular contact with the student can let the student know that the CARE Team is attempting to contact them to help with their situation.

Recommendation 9: Institute a Growth Mindset Focus Throughout Programs and in Classes. In line with the theory of Motivation, many participants noted that PT students especially - but students experiencing economic instability as well - do not consider themselves a student first, meaning that they have other responsibilities and commitments that take precedence over their work as a student. This could include being employed, having dependents, or other life circumstances. Therefore, when students face difficulties, such as unexpected bills or losing their job - essentially the aspects of economic instability - students tend to put their schoolwork on the metaphorical back burner to focus wholly on the issue at hand. This can lead to the student failing or withdrawing from classes, withdrawing from college, or ultimately not receiving their degree or certificate.

Carol Dweck (2007) suggests that a fixed mindset, which is the belief that character, creative ability, and intelligence are static and are unable to change is a main reason that many people fail. Therefore, people that have a fixed mindset tend to avoid challenges and give up easily when presented with obstacles (2007). Conversely, those with a growth mindset - the belief that character, creative ability, and intelligence can be developed - tend to embrace challenges and persist when presented with obstacles

(Dweck, 2007). As a result, people that have a growth mindset tend to be more successful than those that have a fixed mindset.

Therefore, my recommendation is to instill in students a change of mindset, from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset, early in and throughout their programs. One faculty member has started instituting a growth mindset lesson in all of their classes regardless of the level - whether it is a developmental course or a college level course. Anecdotally, the faculty member has seen an increase in the tenacity of their students, resulting in a higher overall passer rating since instituting the lessons on developing a growth mindset.

Unfortunately, this is only one faculty member, and they only reach a small percentage of the students. Therefore, in order to truly start to develop a growth mindset in the student population, I recommend instituting a growth mindset mentality into orientation programing when the students are accepted into the college as well as into each classroom; although it would be a repetitive lesson, it would drive home the importance of developing a growth mindset, which could help to increase the students' likelihood for success in their classes, as they may not be as quick to give up when challenges arise. In terms of the theory of motivation, instituting a growth mindset mentality would allow students to be able to see the benefit in obtaining the upper levels of the hierarchy of needs despite not necessarily having the former needs met.

Additionally, in order to foster the growth mindset, it would also be important to reiterate the information in other points of contact with the student. As stated above, the advising department attempts to develop relationships with the students in order that the students will reach out if there is an issue. Therefore, advising - and in advising sessions - would be a key opportunity to reiterate this growth mindset, which could be accomplished by helping the student to shift their focus from the problem to focusing on the possible solutions to the problem while at the same time helping them to keep their end goal - to graduate with their degree or certificate program to earn a better living for themselves and their families - when making decisions.

Theory and Future Research

Because the community college is so diverse with many different student demographics - and even more so when considering the entire system - it is important to view any research done at the community college through multiple lenses to have the most pragmatic view possible. Therefore, this study was guided by neoliberal theory as a backdrop for the community college setting, along with the theories of motivation and the principal agent theory, culminating in my conceptual framework. Separately each theory offers a view into the community college, but together they form a more holistic picture of the phenomena occurring at the community college level.

Neoliberal theory considers the burden placed on students of having to prove competency in the workforce; therefore, the workforce demands an education in order to obtain a well-paying job, thus contributing to the shifting mission of the community college (Mollenkopf-Pigsley, 2015). Additionally, neoliberal theory also explains why college has become so underfunded - a result of the “student as customer” mentality (Mintz, 2021, p.1) The theory of motivation delves into the physiological and psychological aspect of students, where it is much more difficult to be successful in classes when students’ more basic needs are not met, although the aforementioned need for education for employment can create - perhaps ironically - the drive to be successful in order to receive a higher paying job to be able to meet those more basic needs. Finally, the principal agent theory provides an explanation into how the colleges function, either as part of a system as is the case with the CCCS, or even within the college itself with different departments handling the organizational guidelines and procedures differently depending on the students' needs that they are interacting with. Principal Agent Theory also explains how principals -the CCCS for this study - enact policies implemented by the agent - the CC - in ways that the agent may not intend or expect, such as with the workplace literacy programs, where the CCCS has enacted a policy for workplace literacy programs, but the CC found that they were not cost effective and could not maintain those programs.

It is my recommendation that the CCCS system, individual colleges, and researchers use multiple lenses or theories to study aspects of the community college. Although I recommend using my conceptual framework to study the community college, there are other theories that can be used, such as Social Reproduction Theory, Funds of Knowledge Theory, Household Production Theory, Challenge and Support Theory, or Experiential Learning Theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Becker & Tomes, 1979; Patton et al., 2016; Evans et al., 1998). Regardless of what theories are utilized, it is important that researchers use multiple theories or frameworks to provide a more holistic picture of the data at hand. This will enable a view of the research that takes into account the diversity and pragmatic nature of the community college; thus, the data will be more complete and would improve the quality of decision making.

Additionally, for future research, I suggest that students be interviewed in addition to employees. Interviewing students would allow the researcher to view the data from the students' perspective and be able to elicit information on what changes the students would like to see for them to feel more supported. Another opportunity would be to perform a longitudinal study with a set of students to see how the changes implemented at the community college affected the students' ability to be successful in classes. Either of these two suggestions, however, would require additional steps in order to secure FERPA release information to be able to access their private student data, which is something future researchers would have to plan for.

Conclusion

This study examined what CCCS policies that affect Post-Traditional students and students facing economic instability. Using the Holsti Content Analysis model (Holsti, 1969) to review the policies, I found that the majority of the CCCS policies did not directly deal with any students, much less PT students and students dealing with economic instability, and the ones that did were more generalized and could be applied to any students and not necessarily specifically toward those two student populations. Using this information, I worked with the CC using the Utilization Focused Evaluation method to develop an evaluation to determine how the college as a whole interpreted these policies and how the policies were implemented at the institutional level, as well as within the departments with regard to how they interacted with PT students and students dealing with economic instability. The focus of the UTE is for the end user - in this case the CC - to be able to use the information produced to make informed decisions to help address needs identified from the evaluations.

The evaluation asked a series of questions to 18 total individuals from the CC; five from the CC administration, five from the financial aid office, four from the advising department, and four faculty members. These interview questions were important because they centered around the participants experiences and how they felt the college as a whole worked with PT students and students dealing with economic instability; what resources were offered, how the students could be helped if they were struggling, how the departments interacted with one another with regard to student needs, and most importantly, how they felt all those situations added together to affect the students' ability to be successful in their classes, and by extension their degree or certificate programs.

The participants' stories painted a picture of how PT students and students dealing with economic instability face challenges in their classes and during college due to the neoliberal aspects of community college, such as maintaining Satisfactory Academic Progress, and the effect that their outside commitments and issues played into their focus level in the classroom. Although COVID forced the CC to make some pivotal changes to better serve their students, such as adding cross campus class schedules -the real time remote classes- and online advising appointments which the Administration believes that will continue post-pandemic, the participants' descriptions suggested that more could - and should - be done to help these populations be successful in their programs.

Using a thematic inductive approach, I identified from the interview data five major themes relating to issues with communication and fiscal constraints that ultimately have an effect on the ability of PT students and students dealing with economic instability to be successful in their classes. These were issues with communication between departments, issues with written communication, issues with student communication, lack of resources to adequately help students in need, and inability to hire enough employees to adequately address student needs.

Keeping in mind the conceptual framework, I identified nine different recommendations using the themes found in the data that I believe could help address these needs and ultimately help students to succeed in their classes. Using the UFE method, my hope is that the CCCS and the CC will take these recommendations into consideration in order to more adequately help PT students and students dealing with economic instability.

In reflecting on the research study throughout the process, I remember what it was like being a PT student and dealing with economic instability while trying to attend a community college. I can envision myself as one of the students at the CC struggling to be successful while battling the outside forces yet knowing that success would mean the opportunity to earn a living for myself and my family. I also know that any help that I could have been afforded would have made the journey just that much easier, so it is my hope that any recommendations that I make can positively affect these students' abilities to be successful in their classes, in their programs, and ultimately, in life.

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Appendix A

Financial Aid Interview Questions

1) Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? How long have you been at CC? Why did you

choose to work at a community college?

2) (How) Does your department identify students dealing with economic instability?

a. Do they self-disclose their financial difficulties or do you have alerts in place to identify students who are struggling?

3) What are the types of financial challenges or economic instability your students face?

a. How have you seen these situations affect students' ability to be successful in classes?

4) CC has a large number of Adult-Learners (PT students). What, in your experience, are the

needs of these students?

a. How do adult learners' needs differ from that of students that attend right out of high school?

b. What services does your department have in place to help support adult learners?

SP 4-20b – Financial Aid Professional Judgment

How does the professional judgement process work at CC for reducing EFC/ increasing aid?

5) If a student doesn't have enough of a chance in EFC to be eligible for additional aid but is

still struggling financially, what resources does your office provide or direct the student to?

a. Do you have examples of the resources?

SP 4-20d – Satisfactory Academic Progress for Financial Aid

6) What is the process for appealing?

a. What is the criteria for approval?

b. What is the likelihood for approval?

c. What does professional judgement look like in the Satisfactory Academic Progress process?

SP 4-24 – Colorado Student Grant Awarding Procedure

7) What does the EFC chart look like for CSG at CC?

8) What is the maximum per year? Is it prorated for enrollment?

9) Is there discretion in awarding additional CSG, or is it conditional to EFC?

SP 4-23 – College Opportunity Fund

10) The CCCS allows a 1 year waiver for COF for students that haven't finished their degree

in 150% of time. What if students are only attending part time; would you be open to the COF waiver policy to be changed to a 1 year waiver or X amount of credits to finish the degree? How do you think that would affect students' abilities to graduate?

11) Due to the COVID pandemic, an unprecedented amount of students experienced economic instability. What policies have been implemented in your department to help address these needs? Will these changes be maintained after the pandemic is over?

12) If you could make any changes to how your department handles situations with adult learners and students facing economic instability, what would those changes look like,

and why?

13) How do other departments on campus impact your work with these populations of students?

a. What advise would you give different departments to make sure these students were better helped overall?

14) Anything else you think would be important for this study?

Appendix B

Faculty Interview Questions

1) Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? How long have you been at CC? Why did you choose to work at a community college?

2) (How) Does your department identify students dealing with economic instability?

a. Do they self-disclose their financial difficulties or do you have alerts in place to identify students who are struggling?

3) What are the types of financial challenges or economic instability your students face?

a. How have you seen these situations affect students' ability to be successful in classes?

4) If a student in your class came to you and said that they were struggling academically, what are the types of things you do to try and help the student in the classroom?

5) Do you have any resources you give students that are struggling academically?

BP 9-80 – Academic Standards and Practices

SP 9-80a – Academic Standards

6) What does this look like at CC?

7) Are faculty members allowed to use professional judgment when grading, or is there a set system? What does that system look like?

SP 9-41 – Assessment for College Readiness

8) What does remediation and developmental education look like at CC?

9) How would changing this to allow for credit while in development/remedial courses change your teaching practices in the classroom?

10) CC has a large number of Adult-Learners (PT students). What, in your experience, are the

needs of these students?

a. How do adult learners' needs differ from that of students that attend right out of high school?

b. What services does CC have in place to help support adult learners?

11) Due to the COVID pandemic, an unprecedented amount of students experienced economic instability. What policies were implemented in your department to help address these needs? Will these changes be maintained after the pandemic is over?

12) If you could make any changes to how your department handles situations with adult learners and students facing economic instability, what would those changes look like, and why?

13) How do other departments on campus impact your work with these populations of students?

a. What advise would you give different departments to make sure these students were better helped overall?

14) Anything else you think would be important for this study?

Appendix C

Advising Interview Questions

1) Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? How long have you been at CC? Why did you choose to work at a community college?

2) (How) Does your department identify students dealing with economic instability?

a. Do they self-disclose their financial difficulties or do you have alerts in place to identify students who are struggling?

3) What are the types of financial challenges or economic instability your students face?

a. How have you seen these situations affect students' ability to be successful in classes?

4) If a student came to you and said they were struggling – academic or financially, what would be your process for helping them?

a. What resources do you provide for students when they are struggling?

BP 9-72 – Transfer of Post-Secondary Credits from Area Technical Colleges to Community

Colleges

SP 9-72 – Transfer of Post-Secondary Credits from Area Technical Colleges to Community

Colleges

5) What does the technical college transfer from a technical college look like at CC?

6) How do these credits transfer?

BP 9-42 – Prior Learning Assessment Credit

SP 9-42 – Prior Learning Assessment Credit

7) What does the PLA look like at CC?

8) What is the likelihood a student will earn a significant amount of credits from PLA?

9) Do you think an improvement to this policy to include prior work or life experience (experiential learning) for credit would be a good idea? Why or why not?

10) CC has a large number of Adult-Learners (PT students). What, in your experience, are the

needs of these students?

a. How do adult learners' needs differ from that of students that attend right out of high school?

b. What services does CC have in place to help support adult learners?

11) Due to the COVID pandemic, an unprecedented amount of students experienced economic instability. What policies in your department were implemented to help address these needs? Will these changes be maintained after the pandemic is over?

12) If you could make any changes to how your department handles situations with adult learners and students facing economic instability, what would those changes look like, and why?

13) How do other departments on campus impact your work with these populations of students?

a. What advise would you give different departments to make sure these students were better helped overall?

14) Anything else you think is important to know for this study?

Appendix D

Administration Interview Questions

1) Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? How long have you been at CC? Why did you choose to work at a community college?

2) What is the process for interpreting and implementing policies from the CCCS at CC?

a. What is the process for reviewing these policies to ensure they are still in compliance?

3) How does the college identify students dealing with economic instability?

a. Do they self-disclose their financial difficulties or do you have alerts in place to identify students who are struggling?

4) CC has a large number of Adult-Learners (PT students). What, in your experience, are the needs of these students?

a. How do adult learners' needs differ from that of students that attend right out of high school?

b. What services does your department have in place to help support adult learners?

BP 4-20 – Student Tuition and Fees/Scholarships

The fee assessment section of this policy says: "Such itemization shall not be required for any academic course fee that is specifically listed in the course catalog. Any optional fees or charges that are automatically assessed unless the student chooses not to pay, except for health care fees, shall be refunded by the institution or organization that receives the fee, upon request, to any student who paid the fee."

5) How do you interpret this policy?

6) Are these fees mandatory, or are there exceptions to be able to refund the fees?The tuition assessment section of this policy states: "Only registered students paying the required tuition will be permitted to attend classes for which they are registered. The president of the college may provide exemptions to this rule in the even that the student who is exempted is registered at the college and paying tuition."

7) How do you interpret this policy?

8) What does this policy look like at CC?

9) If the president can make an exemption, is it possible to make exemptions for certain groups of students?

SP 9-20a – Service Area Principles and Guidelines

This policy states: "It is important for community colleges to develop the strongest possible
positive relationships with all constituents within the geographic region they serve", and "Quality and customer service should be in the forefront as institutions respond to needs and
opportunities".

10) How do you interpret this policy at CC?

BP 9-43 – Certification of Workplace Literacy Programs

11) What is a workplace literacy program?

12) Can students that attend these programs also get college credit?

BP 4-20 – Student Tuition and Fees/Scholarships

13) The CCCS has categorical scholarships, such as scholarships for senior citizens. How would adding a category for Adult-Learners or students experiencing economic

instability affect the outcome measures for CC?

14) Due to the COVID pandemic, an unprecedented amount of students experienced economic instability. What policies did you change from the institutional level to help address these needs? Will these changes be maintained after the pandemic is over?

15) Could you tell me more about your Adult Learning Center?

a. How does the center function in relation to the other campuses?

16) If you could make any changes to the CCCS policies to better help adult learners and students experiencing economic instability, what would you change and why?

17) Anything else you think would be important for this study?

Appendix E

Recruitment Email

SUBJECT: Invitation to Participate in Doctoral Research Study

Dear [NAME]:

My name is Joshua Bowens and I am a doctoral candidate of higher education at the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about how the college interprets Colorado Community College System policies that affect the outcomes of non-traditional students and students dealing with Economic Instability. You're eligible to be in this study because you work in the [Department] at [College Name Redacted]. I obtained your contact information from [Name Redacted].

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be invited to complete a 30-minute interview in person or ever the phone depending on your availability. I would like to audio record your interview and then we'll use the information to get a better understanding of the college's role in the outcomes of non-traditional students.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you would like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at (970) 208-4664 or Joshua.bowens@du.edu.

Thank you very much!

Best regards,

Joshua Bowens

Appendix F

Verbal Consent Form

DU HRPP/IRB Verbal Consent Version 1.0, Jan 2020

VERBAL CONSENT FORM

Introduction

I am Joshua Bowens, an Ed.D. Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Higher Education at the University of Denver.

I obtained your contact information from [Name Redacted].

Subjects Rights

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time. Choosing not to be in this study or to stop being in this study will not result in any penalty to you or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. Your choice to not be in this study will not negatively affect any rights to which you are otherwise entitled, including your present or future employment.

Description of the study and study procedures

I am conducting a research study to examine how Colorado Community College System policies that affect the outcomes of Post-Traditional, *that is Non-Traditional,* students are implemented here at this school. The Purpose of this research study is to answer these three questions:

1. What Colorado Community College System (CCCS) policies are in place that affect Post-Traditional students and students facing economic instability?
   a. What is the focus - academic or financial - of these policies?
2. How did one community college within the system implement those policies across campus, within individual departments, and in the classroom?
3. How does the implementation of policies at the individual college level affect the ability of Post-Traditional students and students dealing with economic instability to be successful within the classroom?

The name of the study is Policies Affecting Post-Traditional Community College Students Facing Economic Instability. The IRB Project Number is 1520499-1. The person in charge of the study is myself, Joshua Bowens.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to you will be invited to complete a 30 minute – 1 hour interview over the Zoom depending on your availability. During the interview process, you may refuse to answer any question or item. As a university official, we understand that you are incredibly busy and are grateful to you for considering this request. DU HRPP/IRB Verbal Consent Version 1.0, Jan 2020

Risks
There are no expected risks to you as a result of participating in this study: I do not foresee any harm to participants. Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. All audio files and transcriptions will be encrypted and password protected and the passwords will only be shared with the study investigators (Joshua Bowens, Ed.D. candidate, and Cecilia Orphan, Assistant Professor, Higher Education, University of Denver).

Benefits
The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study will be more holistic in nature; it is possible that learning how other departments work with students that deal with economic insecurity will allow you and your department to adopt ways to better serve these individuals. However, we cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your *employment*

Alternatives
You may choose to not participate in this research study.

Financial Information
Participation in this study will involve no cost to you. You will not be paid for participating in this study.

Confidentiality
Study records that can identify you will be kept confidential by participant information being anonymized and the participating university will not be identified in order to further protect the identity of those participating. The audio recordings will only be kept long enough to transcribe the audio, and will be deleted immediately after; the transcribed data will be kept for 3 years, encrypted, on a secure DU Server.
The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

Whom to contact with questions
If you have any questions or problems during your time on this study, you should contact the Principal Investigator, Joshua Bowens, at 970-208-4664 or Joshua.Bowens@du.edu, as well as the faculty sponsor, Cecilia Orphan, at 303-871-3619 or Cecilia.Orphan@du.edu.
If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office at (303)871-2121.

Consent Section
Do you wish to participate? DU HRPP/IRB Verbal Consent Version 1.0, Jan 2020

Record Subject’s response: Yes No “Do you agree to be audio-taped?”
Record Subject’s response: Yes No

____ ______

Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date
If you would like a copy of this letter for your records, please let me know and I will

email it to you.

DU HRPP/IRB Verbal Consent
Version 1.0, Jan 2020