

EXAMINING THE ROLES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES
OF HIGH SCHOOL COLLEGE ADVISORS ASSISTING
UNDERSERVED STUDENTS

by

Jessica C. Enyioha, M.Ed., B.A.

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
with a Major in School Improvement
December 2021

Committee Members:

Melissa A. Martinez, Chair

Barry J. Aidman

Paige Haber-Curran

Clarena Larrotta

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to students from underserved backgrounds who aspire to attain higher education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I acknowledge and appreciate Father God for blessing me with the opportunity to pursue a doctoral degree. The past four years have been a marathon. I thank Father God for equipping me with the skills needed to succeed as well as connecting me with resources aiding in the achievement of my goals.

The journey. This process has taught me that I can truly achieve anything that I set my mind to. Take everything day by day. Plan but do not get too far ahead of myself. Any length of step forward counts toward the larger goal. Choose myself daily and take care of all aspects: physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional.

I could not have completed the process alone. A special thank you to Dr. Martinez for being with me every step of this study's process. Thank you to Dr. Larrotta for truly guiding me in becoming a strong qualitative researcher. Thank you to Dr. Aidman and Dr. Haber-Curran for being a part of the committee dream team and offering me your expertise in college access and student affairs. Thank you to my participants for enthusiastically taking part of this study to inform the college access field. A special thank you to my mom, Magdalena De La Cruz. My mom's selfless, continuous support and love have embraced me through the completion of this dissertation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
ACT	American College Test- standardized college entrance exam
FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid
CBO	Community Based Organization
IEC	Independent Educational Consultant
K-12	Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade
NACAC	National Association for College Admission Counseling
PD	Professional Development
SAT	Formerly referred to as the Scholastic Assessment Test- standardized college entrance exam
SES	Socioeconomic status
TACAC	Texas Association for College Admission Counseling

ABSTRACT

High school college advisors have a crucial role in providing college access for underserved students, yet there is little known about how they are prepared and supported in their positions. A multiple case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008) was conducted to examine the varying ecological factors that directly and indirectly impact college advisors' roles within high schools as well as their professional development.

The research questions that guided this study were: (1) How do college advisors serving underserved students in high school contexts describe their onboarding and ongoing professional development experiences? (2) How can an ecological framework assist in understanding the factors that shape college advisors' roles within their high school contexts and professional development experiences? (3) How can the narratives of college advisors inform best practices to support them in their roles in facilitating college access for underserved students? The study included six participants who provided varying forms of data including a questionnaire, documents, an individual interview, and focus group. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and the Ecology of College Readiness Model (Arnold et al., 2012) served as the foundation for the creation of the framework that guided this study: the Ecological Model of a College Advisor's Professional Development. The study's overarching, thematic findings included: informal training, self-teaching, and learning with the students; all things college related; relationship building & collaboration; advocacy: going above and beyond to assist; barriers college advisors face; and college advisors' need for professional development

for advising specific student populations. The factors revealed as influencing the roles and professional development of each of the participants within their high school contexts such as compassion and motivation, kindergarten through twelfth grade school systems, curriculum design, school leader's values, high school's college-going culture reputation, and lack of resources are discussed. Lastly, implications and recommendations based on the study's findings are presented.

I. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND: MY STORY

I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma. And dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It's not just quitting on yourself, it's quitting on your country — and this country needs and values the talents of every American. That is why we will provide the support necessary for you to complete college and meet a new goal: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. (Federal Government, 2009, p. 21)

PRESIDENT OBAMA, FEBRUARY 24, 2009, ADDRESS TO A JOINT
SESSION OF CONGRESS

President Obama set the initiative for all Americans to pursue education beyond high school with the goal of contributing their talents to the workforce in the United States. While this is an admirable initiative it is important to recognize that the United States has a history of Americans aspiring to achieve higher education but lacking the support needed to smoothly navigate higher education. Acknowledging the oppressive history of groups of Americans not having access to higher education aids in understanding why the college advisor position in high schools is crucial to supporting all Americans in accessing higher education. This research study examined high school college advisors' roles at their schools, their level of preparation for their position, and onboarding and ongoing professional development experiences. The study's findings inform means to improve the higher education access for students who have a familial history of not attaining postsecondary education. My mom's journey accessing college is shared as an example of an American who aspired to attain a higher education but experienced numerous challenges in achieving her degree. My own story in accessing college and assisting students with accessing college is then provided to reveal the

support that I received as well as explain how my experiences inform the study and contribute to the study's problem statement and significance.

As a Mexican American, first-generation college student, my mom was unaware of the financial aid resources she qualified for and did not have anyone to guide her through the college admission process. She worked full-time and attended college part-time. My mom paid out-of-pocket to pursue higher education and earned her bachelor's degree in eight years. She completed her degree when I was two years old. My single mom balanced raising me and having two jobs during the first part of my life. Growing up, she worked to instill in me the value of education. She stressed the importance of succeeding in school and attending college so that I could use my education to avoid struggling financially the way our family members had. With my value of education and determination to be a second-generation college student that would pave the way for more of my family members to achieve higher education, I worked hard in high school to make college my reality.

I attended a public high school in southeast Austin consisting predominantly of Latino and African American students coming from low-income and working-class backgrounds. The high school was made up of about 1,300 students and averaged four school counselors at any given time to serve all the students' academic support needs. I remember my college access process as a student vividly. I recall the last day of school in ninth grade rushing to submit my application to the school counselor's office, pleading that she allow me into the Early College High School (ECHS) program even though I missed the deadline. I could tell that the school counselor did not know my name or how rare it was for an all-A student like me to miss a deadline and was slightly annoyed by me

rushing into her office. She stood by the program having a hard deadline and did not accept my late application. I was turned away, but this did not stop me. For a student like me, who comes from a family history of not attaining higher education, and who sees education as a tool for upward social mobility, this opportunity meant changing my family's lives; even though I did not know how to name all of this at the time.

I decided to enroll myself in dual credit courses separately from the ECHS program. I remember as a sophomore walking back and forth across the street traveling from my high school to community college, attempting to complete dual credit paperwork on my own. I was asked for additional signatures on documents, my social security card, and government issued identification card: all of which required additional trips from my home, to school, to the community college. These required documents and continuous trips back and forth are barriers for first-generation and low-income students trying to access higher education. However, I never allowed myself to give up the idea of taking free college courses. I completed every task that was asked of me to enroll but could easily see how other students end up falling through the cracks of the demands of the college access process—the process is difficult when you do not have guidance. I enrolled myself in free, dual credit courses and achieved the goal of earning thirty hours of college credit by the time I graduated from high school.

In eleventh grade, I remember my worried mom unsure of how to help me navigate the 4-year college application process, much less fund the upcoming years of higher education. I recall my mom going above and beyond to advocate for me by connecting us with College Forward, a non-profit, college access organization that specifically guides first-generation and low-income students in accessing and achieving

higher education. We did not feel confident in relying on the school for college access guidance. The lack of support I received from my school counselor when I attempted to enroll in dual credit courses, along with the school's high student-to-counselor ratios, encouraged my mom to seek assistance from an outside organization.

College Forward guided my mom and me through the unknown. I remember feeling confident that being ranked third in my graduating class would ensure me a full-ride scholarship. I "put all my eggs in one basket" called the Gates Millennium Scholarship, advancing to become a finalist but ultimately not selected. I remember the stinging feeling from the words my College Forward advisor used to inform me that I most likely would not get admitted to my dream college. My College Forward advisor helped me apply for admission to eight colleges. Although at the time, I did not know my advisor strategically assisted me in applying to a list of colleges: she knew I would be admitted to many of them, with the low possibility of being admitted to two in particular. Though my college advisor was working to set me up for success, it was from this experience of being told that I essentially could not achieve something that has guided my own work as a college advisor. I strive never to tell students that they will not be admitted to a college and instead work to empower them to become excited about multiple great college options that could be a good fit for them.

My senior year, I remember reviewing the financial aid package from my top choice college, Baylor University, and feeling confused. My college advisor informed me that my family would have to take out \$17,000 in private loans per year for me to attend. My college advisor highly encouraged me to consider attending Southwestern University, a small, private, liberal arts college that offered me the most amount of financial aid out

of all the colleges I applied to. My mentor and chosen family member, Aunt Janine is an alumna of Southwestern University. She took me on a tour of the university and advocated for me in my meeting with the admission and financial aid office. Little did I know that Southwestern University would offer a high-achieving, high-financial-need, AfroLatina such as myself a financial aid package covering 100 percent of my family's financial need. While I was in shock about Baylor University expecting my family to contribute \$17,000 per year, I had an offer from a liberal arts college covering all my educational expenses.

Without the guidance of College Forward and my mentor, I might have attended Baylor and completed my college degree with a large amount of debt. Instead, I attended Southwestern University and earned a bachelor's degree in three years acquiring very little debt. I acknowledge my college advisor and mentor when reflecting on my success in earning a bachelor's degree, but I cannot help but think about the students who do not have key advocates such as these guiding them through the college admission process. I believe that all students deserve equitable guidance through the college admission process regardless of whether their family has a history of attaining a higher education. My personal experiences in accessing college, along with what I have observed with so many students from first-generation, college-going families and/or low-income backgrounds struggling to access higher education, stimulated my fascination with college advising.

After serving as a student member, mentor, and intern for College Forward, I decided to dedicate my career to college access. I earned a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies and proceeded to pursue a master's degree. I knew that I wanted

to become a high school college advisor but was unsure which graduate degree program would be the right fit for my career needs. I was not interested in becoming a classroom teacher so that eliminated me from pursuing a degree in school counseling as the state of Texas requires school counselors to have at least two years of classroom teaching prior to becoming a school counselor (ASCA, 2018). I also knew that I did not aspire to become a high school principal, therefore a degree in educational administration did not seem to be the right fit. A graduate degree in college access was not an option offered by universities, thus I decided to pursue an area that was similar: Student Affairs in Higher Education (SAHE). The Master of Education in the SAHE program primarily prepares graduate students to work in higher education student support settings (Texas State University, 2018). I learned about the history of higher education, student development theory, organizational leadership, and social justice advocacy. I recall taking the knowledge learned in class and tailoring it to apply to the high school setting as I worked with high school juniors and seniors. Although the program was not tailored to professionals working within a high school setting, I utilized the program's internship requirement as an opportunity to gain experience working in a college and career center, at a Title I high school with 2,800 students, serving as a temporary college advisor.

Sarah, the college advisor who I contacted asking to serve as her intern, hired me instead as her temporary substitute as she was due to go on maternity leave in a month. Within the timespan of a month, Sarah attempted to teach me everything she knew about college advising and working with students. I did not have access to training in the form of workshops and online-training modules. There were no certification requirements I had to earn, nor anyone monitoring how I worked with students and holding me

accountable for truly getting students enrolled in higher education. While I was excited for the opportunity to learn on the job and prove myself worthy, I could not help but feel as if I was put in the position to either sink or swim. While these two options affected me, they had an even bigger impact on the students I was responsible for serving; the strength of my college advising knowledge and delivery potentially impacted the futures of students. Advising, not advising, and poorly advising students, particularly those who have limited social capital when it comes to the college admissions process and do not have people to guide them, shaped their career trajectories. After talking to college advisor colleagues serving in the same school district, I learned how fortunate I was to have had at least a month of informal training on college advising. Many college advisors had not received any form of training, or professional development, and were left to teach themselves on how to guide students in accessing higher education.

I achieved my master's degree in 2015. From 2014 to 2020, I continuously served as a full-time, high school college advisor in multiple school settings including a public, Title I high school and a public, single-gender, magnet, sixth through twelfth grade school. From my experience of working with students from disadvantaged backgrounds as a college advisor, I have noticed how closely students pay attention to my actions and words. From the moment I step foot on my school's campus, I work to be intentional about the messages I send to students. Oftentimes, I am the only person with whom my students have to talk to about college and ask for help. I work to build a strong, positive rapport with my students to gain their trust and confidence so that they can come to me when they need support. A study conducted by McDonough (2004a) found that counselors can have a strong influence on students' goals and success. I believe that

sending negative messages to students about pursuing higher education and their abilities/odds of gaining admission, consciously or unconsciously, can affect their perceptions of college as an achievable reality (Simmons & Hewitt, 2018). It is not my role to tell students that they cannot get into a college. I assist students in applying to multiple colleges, including those for which the students have a high, medium, and low probability of admission. This approach was similar to that which my College Forward advisor took with me. The weight of my students trusting me to help them with their future possibilities is a heavy responsibility. It is as if they view me as a gatekeeper who holds the key that unlocks the gate to higher education. González et al.'s (2003) College Opportunity Framework speaks to how college advisors “serve as either agents of social capital or institutional abuse and neglect” (p. 167). I have the power to impact my students’ fates by choosing to help or not help students pursue higher education. My personal connection to what it is to come from a background of not having access to higher education strongly shapes my passion for college advising and wanting to provide quality college advising to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

As I continued in my career, I yearned to advance my education and professional development in college access. I was unsuccessful in finding a doctoral program in college access when I first began my search. Again, I was faced with the dilemma of having to pick between pursuing a degree tailored to kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) educational leadership and higher education leadership. This time around, I chose to pursue a Doctorate in School Improvement with the intention of learning more about the building of college access on the K-12 side. I hope that from the knowledge acquired in the SAHE and School Improvement programs that I will have a clearer picture on how

I can make a stronger impact within the college access field. I aspire to bridge the two worlds into one to best support the college access and attainment of students who have been historically oppressed. My journey navigating a career in college access intrigues me to learn more about other college advisors' experiences with training and professional development support.

The Problem with College Access and Preparing College Advisors

Although the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 was put in place to abolish slavery, forms of slavery and its effects continue to exist in the United States (Clayton, 2018). The United States society operates within a system of power and oppression (Wallace & Allen, 2016) and unfortunately, diversity is used to determine which groups are given privilege over others who are disadvantaged. Elements of diversity include “but [are] not limited to age, class, color, culture, disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, marital status, political ideology, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status” (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p.7). Historically in the United States, communities of color such as African Americans and Latinos, as well as women experience discrimination and hardship solely because of their diverse identities (Grant & Zwier, 2011). According to Serna and Woulfe (2017), “in the United States the dominant class remains primarily white, male, heterosexual, and wealthy” (p. 4). Money is also a source used to divide people: those who are wealthy have privilege over those who are economically disadvantaged (Dalton & Crosby, 2015).

A higher education can aid one in upward social mobility (Knight-Diop, 2010); however, not everyone living in the United States has access to higher education, such as

students from low-income backgrounds (Kezar, 2009). Minoritized racial/ethnic groups including African Americans and Latino Americans, individuals from low-income and working-class backgrounds, and families who have not attained higher education, referred to as underserved for the purpose of this study, have historically been oppressed through systemic inequities within the education system limiting their access to college (Perna et al., 2008; Welton & Martinez, 2014). Limiting minoritized groups' access to college is a strategy to perpetuate their oppression essentially causing these groups to remain in an inferior status; "in the absence of equal educational opportunity, democracy suffers, talent is lost, culture erodes, and liberty is undermined" (Simmons & Hewitt, 2018, p. 7). Underserved students may have the potential to succeed in college but not possess the resources necessary to attend (Welton & Williams, 2015).

Research reveals that underserved students have limited access to college preparation resources in high school compared to their privileged counterparts (Pineda & Drummond, 2018; Welton & Martinez, 2014), which is an example of a systemic inequity, and "schooling [is] a primary means for the perpetuation of the dominant class's ideologies, values, and power. The ability to access college is so closely tied to these constructs that it contributes to this dominance and marginalization" (Serna & Woulfe, 2017, p. 1). Another systemic inequity is that African Americans, Latino Americans, and individuals from working-class, low-income backgrounds are more segregated than ever in schools (Curry, 2014). High schools that predominantly educate underserved students experience high teacher turnover, limited technology, less autonomy in the classroom (Garcia & Weiss, 2019), are underfunded, and classified as Title I schools (Cascio et al., Reber, 2013). Title I schools work through endless forms of adversity including their

students performing low on standardized tests as well as not scoring high on college readiness measures (Welton & Williams, 2015) which are areas that schools are evaluated on for state accountability (Loeb & Figlio, 2011), and barriers to attending college for underserved students (Serna & Woulfe, 2017). Schools' failure to meet state accountability measures result in the closing of schools (Ravitch, 2016). The high schools who educate predominately students of color and students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds take on the challenge of meeting accountability requirements while also focusing on preparing their students for the college admission process (Welton & Williams, 2015). These schools need more support for assisting underserved students in pursuing higher education (Serna & Woulfe, 2017).

Underserved students rely on their schools for guidance on pursuing higher education (Stillisano et al., 2014) because of their familial history of being oppressed and denied liberties through systemic barriers such as the ones contributing to limiting access to higher education (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Schools are often the only resource underserved students have for guidance in coming up with a college plan for after high school (González et al., 2003; Stephan, 2013). According to the United for College Success Coalition (2020), "secondary education institutions should be accountable for the success of their students beyond high school" (para. 1). One way that schools are increasing their efforts to support more students in pursuing higher education is through the creation of the high school college advisor role (Stephan, 2013). College advisors' main functions are to promote a college-going culture within the school, advise students through the college admission and financial aid application processes, and assist students with selecting a college for attendance (Damico, 2016). College advisors differ from

school counselors (Stephan, 2013). School counselors are tasked with duties such as course scheduling, promoting a positive mental health school climate (Mau et al., 2016), test administration (West, 2020), and administrative tasks often unrelated to their counselor role such as monitoring the cafeteria during school lunch (O'Connor, 2018) thus leaving them with limited time to thoroughly educate students on college access (Domina & Woods, 2014; Hodges, 2010). School systemic inequities make it difficult for school counselors to focus on college access for students even though they may be willing and wanting to assist students in that capacity. It is important to note that the college advisor position exists in a portion of United States schools, but the majority of schools do not have the college advisor position, which is why college advising is a newly rising field, meaning that it is common for school counselors to have a plethora of duties including college advising. For this study, the college advisor position is focused on.

College advisors have a crucial role in providing college access for underserved students (Aidman & Malerba, 2015), yet there is little known about how they are prepared for (i.e., training and professional development) and supported in their work in high school settings. It is also unclear what impact ecological influences have on college advisors' professional development (PD) and the roles they have within their schools. Many college advisors do not possess a teaching or counseling certification and do not have a background in working with students within a high school context (Stephan, 2013). This is often the case because employers of college advisors do not have to make certifications a requirement for the role. For instance, a job posting by the Houston Independent School District for a public high school college and career readiness advisor

included in its job description that the applicant must have a bachelor's degree and "2 to 5 years of professional experience in an academic setting [is] strongly preferred [and] experience in student counseling, teaching, or college admissions [is] also preferred" (HISD, 2020, p. 2). The Noble Network of Charter Schools (2020) similarly posted a job posting for a charter school college counselor with minimum qualifications stating a "bachelor's degree [is] required...eligibility to work in the United States on a full-time basis...[and an] active Illinois Teaching License [is] preferred, not required" (para. 7). The applicant requirements for a college counselor position at Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School, a private school, include a "bachelor's degree in a related field required; master's degree in counseling [is] preferred...[a] minimum of five years of relevant experience in Catholic or independent schools or a university admission setting [is] preferred" (Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School, 2020, para. 3). It is evident in the three job postings that teaching or counseling certifications are currently deemed unnecessary for college counselors in K-12 settings.

As of 2020, the college advising profession in high school settings does not have a set of standards for which college advisors are required to abide by, nor an accountability system that works to ensure the competencies of college advisors. I argue that there is a need for the new field of college advising to be held accountable for the training and PD support of college advisors as the field will continue to grow as efforts are made to close the opportunity gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and ensure more students attain a higher education. Data from the United States National Center for Education Statistics/Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (2019) revealed that in 2018, Black and Hispanic students enrolled in a public, 4-year institution on average of 12%

and 20%, respectively, compared to White students who enrolled at 56%, revealing the opportunity gap. The opportunity gap is also evident given that only 9% of students from low-income backgrounds achieve a bachelor's degree by age 24, in comparison to 77% of those from higher income backgrounds (Sherman, 2015). Training and support can aid college advisors in staying updated on policies that affect school accountability and students' college access, as well as current best practices for empowering underserved students. The success of college advisors effectively providing college access to underserved students also benefits others (Dalton & Crosby, 2015). Schools rely on college advisors to help them meet accountability standards regarding college readiness measures, and the United States economy benefits from the work of college advisors as they contribute to having more professionals with higher education in the workforce (Bush, 2017). Higher education has the potential to aid individuals in earning higher-paying careers, thus helping to end cycles of familial poverty (Bathmaker et al., 2016; Knight-Diop, 2010). As the college advising profession continues to expand, it is crucial that college advisors providing college access to underserved students in high school contexts are trained and continuously supported professionally. It is also important that college advisors are held accountable for PD to assist the college advising field in continuously enhancing their work to serve students effectively and efficiently in accessing higher education.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do college advisors serving underserved students in high school contexts describe their onboarding and ongoing professional development experiences?

2. How can an ecological framework assist in understanding the factors that shape college advisors' roles within their high school contexts and professional development experiences?
3. How can the narratives of college advisors inform best practices to support them in their roles in facilitating college access for underserved students?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of high school college advisors' (HISD Communications, 2015), also referred to as college counselors (Terepka, 2006), college coaches (Stephan, 2013), and college advising professionals (Clayton, 2019), roles and onboarding and ongoing PD experiences. The study sought to learn more about the roles college advisors have within their schools to provide comprehension of the PD support they need. This study's findings inform means to improve college access for underserved students. Underserved students deserve college advisors who are trained and skilled in the process of accessing higher education to guide them. The context of this study included high schools that serve at least 50 percent of students from underserved backgrounds which included traditional public, charter, and private high schools. The study focused on the roles and PD experiences of college advisors and inform the college advising field of the state of training and support college advisors experience in high school settings providing college advising to underserved students.

Brief Overview of Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided the study was Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which focuses on the role that environments have on human

development. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory consists of a five-level model: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, and places the child in the center of the model. There are unique factors located within each of the five levels that impact human development. A further description of the five levels and their influences is provided in the theoretical framework section of this study.

Bronfenbrenner's theory undergirds the Ecology of College Readiness model offered by Arnold et al. (2012). In their model the student is placed in the center and the influences impacting a student's readiness for college are examined. In this study the Ecology of College Readiness model was modified to be applied to the roles and professional development of college advisors who serve high school students. The modified model is called the Ecological Model of a College Advisor's PD. The Ecological Model of a College Advisor's PD supported the study by providing a lens to specifically explore the different layers of factors and interactions that directly and indirectly affect college advisor's roles and professional development within the systems they operate in. The adapted model aided with making sense of the experiences of college advisors within the different systems through the examination of the five system levels and their unique influences. A more in-depth discussion of the theoretical framework is offered in Chapter II. The following section includes the research methods utilized to answer the research questions.

Brief Overview of Methodology

The study used the qualitative approach of a multiple case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A qualitative research approach was appropriate as it allowed for "study[ing] things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in

terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). According to Merriam (2009), “the product of a qualitative inquiry is richly descriptive” (p. 16) and this was fitting as the study sought to provide an in-depth description of college advisors’ roles, and onboarding and ongoing professional development experiences at their high schools. The multiple case study approach assisted in examining multiple cases to become better informed on the cases’ differences and similarities (Baxter, & Jack, 2008). College advisors working in schools serving at least 50% of underserved students served as units of study, or cases.

The setting of the multiple case study consisted of high school contexts serving at least 50% of students coming from underserved backgrounds which included traditional public high schools, charter high schools, and private high schools. The study had six college advisors who served as participants. The case study utilized the qualitative, common data collection methods of interviews, a focus group, and document collection (Gall et al., 2010). A field notes journal was also kept keeping track of observations and notes made during data collection.

Significance of Study

College advisors not having mandated requirements to ensure their competencies to advise students, as well as accountability for PD, has been a school improvement issue (Keierleber, 2016). School leaders have needed to learn about college advisors’ educational and work experiences to understand their training and PD needs. The study focused on college advisors’ roles, training, and support to provide an understanding of the duties college advisors have in their positions working in high schools as well as the onboarding and ongoing PD they receive. The findings from this study inform the college

advising field in making recommendations for the profession in having accountability for and building of college advisors' training and support. The college advising field has been at risk of having professionals who are not prepared to fully support underserved students in accessing college (Keierleber, 2016). This study addressed the lack of professional support for college advisors which presently can lead to the misguidance of underserved students in pursuing higher education, potentially resulting in students not attaining higher education.

If the field of high school college advising continues in this state schools will continue to operate within a system that was designed to oppress underserved populations (Serna & Woulfe, 2017; Welton & Martinez, 2014). Underserved students not having access to quality college advising denies them an opportunity for upward social mobility (González et al., 2003), meanwhile privileged students who possess the social and cultural capital to attend college pursue higher education regardless of the level of college advising they receive (Perna et al., 2008). The education system must prevent educating “some [students] into masters [and] others into slaves” (Dewey, 1916, p. 84). In developing the college advisor role, schools have taken on the responsibility of supporting students through the college admission process. Knowing that underserved students rely the most on their high schools for support in accessing higher education (Stillisano et al., 2014), schools must work to ensure the quality of college advising students are receiving. The study was conducted to understand the roles of high school college advisors, their training for the college advisor position, and support received to assist underserved students with accessing college. The findings can be used to assist the college advising field in supporting high school college advisors in staying updated on

factors impacting college access, as well as assisting more underserved students achieve higher education thus working to end the perpetuation of familial poverty. A roadmap for the study is provided to explain the remaining chapters in the study. Chapter I then ends with the study's key terms to inform of important definitions pertaining to this study. A review of the literature on college advising is provided in Chapter II which exposes how the college advisor position has been understudied. The study's theoretical framework is described in depth at the end of Chapter II along with an explanation of how the framework was applied to the study. In Chapter III a rich overview of the methodology utilized in the study is given along with the reasoning behind the selection of a multiple case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008) and data analysis techniques used. The codes and pieces of data that contributed to the study's six thematic findings are provided and the thematic findings are presented in Chapter IV. Lastly, an overview of the study and a discussion of the study's findings in relation to the study's research questions are explained in Chapter V.

Key Terms

College advisor (HISD Communications, 2015), **college advising professional** (Clayton, 2019), **college coach** (Stephan, 2013), **college counselor** (Terepka, 2006) are terms used interchangeably to refer to a professional whose primary role is college advising.

First-generation students are the first in their family to earn a bachelor's degree meaning that neither of their parents attain a bachelor's degree (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012).

Higher education is a bachelor's degree and college is referred to as a higher education institution that awards bachelors' degrees (Toutkoushian et al., 2018).

Low-income students come from a family whose income is lower than 150 percent of the United States poverty level (United States Department of Education, 2019).

Narrative is a story and for the purpose of this study refers to the stories told by college advisors about their experiences in the context of their interviews. Narrative methodology was not utilized in this study.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is the "measure of one's combined economic and social status...[including their] education, income, and occupation" (Baker, 2014, p. 2210).

Title I school has a population of at least forty percent of its students coming from a low-income background (United States Department of Education, 2015).

Underserved Students from disadvantaged backgrounds for the purpose of this study include racially minoritized, African Americans and Latino Americans, individuals from low-income and working-class backgrounds, and families who have not attained higher education.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

An overview of college advising is provided in this literature review. The need to establish national, professional standards, training, and accountability for college advisors is evident as the literature review uncovered the college advising field's lack of mandated PD. This literature review defines college advising, examines how college advisors especially assist underserved students with college access, and then presents the challenges often encountered by college advisors, describing the varying professionals who engage in college advising to review forms of current training and support. The process of becoming a school counselor, their duties, and training and support that is in place is covered to provide a brief comparison of the differences between the school counseling and college advising roles. This comparison is provided because historically school counselors have helped with college advising prior to the creation of the specific college advisor role. Also provided is a review of conceptual models focusing on the impact of ecological systems on students' college decisions, which then leads to the discussion of the theoretical framework that supported this study.

What is College Advising?

According to the National Association for College Admission Counseling (1990), "the vast array of postsecondary opportunities and the attendant requirements for access, coupled with rising college costs and the complexity of the financial aid system, call for a guidance support system to assist students and their parents" (p. 1). College advising exists as a response to families' needs for guidance with accessing higher education. College advising is the service of helping students navigate the college selection process (Clayton, 2019). The college advising process aids students with learning about higher

education institutions and identifying which institutions to apply to. College advising also helps students with completing all sections of the college application, applying for financial aid, and selecting which higher education institution to attend (Clayton, 2019; Stephan, 2013). College advising is slowly becoming more and more of traditional public K-12 schools' responsibility as policies are made tied to college access and readiness efforts (Texas Education Agency, 2019). It is important to note that college advising can be situated in both K-12 and higher education settings and the setting can often influence the role of the professional responsible for college advising. For the purposes of this study, the focus was on college advising in the K-12 setting, which is not to be confused with academic advising at the college level.

The College Advisor Role

College counselors have been described as “change agents with the power to influence campus climates and shape institutional policies” (Davis & Markley, 2000, p. 268). College counselors are educators who serve as “links between the location of childhood and the larger, more risky terrain of first adulthood” (Terepka, 2006, p. 2). The roles of college counselors' have been summarized as having four functions: “counseling, placement, advertisement, and working with parents” (Schuerger, 1970, p. 3). College counselors assist students in building aspirations, learning about college options, and accessing college. They help facilitate parts of the college application process such as obtaining the high school transcript, test scores, and letters of recommendation so that students can submit them to higher education institutions. The roles of college counselors have also been described as “document professors, advisors, counselors, and advocates” (Terepka, 2006, p. 3). Additionally, college counselors work to build and maintain

relationships with higher education institutions in support of assisting their students in gaining college admission. College counselors help families understand college financial expenses and logistics, as well as offer guidance with family conversations on selecting a college of best fit to the family's needs.

How College Advisors Help Students

Emery and Flora's (2006) Community Capital Assets Theory states that when communities have capital assets such as natural capital, cultural capital, human capital, social capital, political capital, financial capital, and built capital they can advance. However, when communities lack capital assets, they may remain stagnant and have a harder time progressing. Emery and Flora (2006) used the metaphor of the spiral to show what occurs when communities experience increases in capital assets, "spiraling-up" (p. 22), and what happens when communities who lack capital assets do not have intervention to assist with supporting them with capital assets, "spiraling down" (p. 22). Underserved students encounter barriers in accessing college due to the lack of capital assets such as knowledge about college, how to apply, and financial assistance. College advisors work to provide underserved students with capital assets by helping students with college advising and financial assistance education. The support of college advisors' aids underserved students in accessing higher education and enabling students to utilize higher education as a tool toward ending the cycle of familial poverty. A college coaching program within Chicago Public Schools was studied to determine if schools can create college-related social capital for students (Stephan, 2013). Stephan found that college coaches use "new college advising strategies" (p. 1) which provide social capital to students and assists them with some of the key college access steps. College coaches

reached out to students, built students' trust, and used students to reach other students. These coaches utilized the bond they had formed with students who they had helped and strategically asked the students to encourage their friends to come work with the college coach. They also worked with multiple students at once and provided students with knowledge about the college and financial aid applications. Lastly, the study's findings revealed that the college coaching program benefited the least advantaged students the most as the coaching program provided social capital to the students who did not already have mentorship from adults who graduated from college, college access knowledge, and financial aid assistance (Stephan, 2013). College advisors take on the large task of aiding students in gaining college admission and with this task comes challenges.

Challenges of College Advising

A unique challenge encountered by college advisors, who serve predominantly first-generation and low-income students, is that students and their families are often unaware that college is an option for them (Falcon, 2015). Many times, college advisors are the first to tell students that they can attend college. Families who have not attended college are unfamiliar with the college admission process and how to apply for financial aid and therefore tend to think college is out of their reach (Falcon, 2015). College advisors are challenged to empower students and families with college knowledge and resources while facilitating the college application process during students' senior year of high school. In this situation, students cram preparing for college during their junior and senior years (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017) in contrast to their high-income counterparts coming from a family history of college graduates who have prepared for college their whole life knowing they would attend under family expectation (Tierney &

Venegas, 2009). College advisors must build underserved families' confidence essentially working to convince them that their students can attend college while teaching families how to engage in the college admission process. Assisting underserved students in accessing college requires time, as it is important that college advisors walk students thoroughly through each step of the process. Unfortunately, another challenge in college advising is public school college advisors having to prioritize which students to serve due to their high student-to-advisor ratio (Perna et al., 2008).

Public school college advisors must prioritize which students to serve and how often they work with the students (Bettinger & Evans, 2019). When there is only one college advisor assigned to work with hundreds of students the reality is that they are not able to thoroughly serve every student's college access needs (Bettinger & Evans, 2019). Unfortunately, students from low-income and first-generation backgrounds are less likely than their counterparts to proactively seek assistance (Falcon, 2015) with college advising and are more likely to not receive sufficient college advising support (Perna et al., 2008). College advisors are challenged to select which students to give the most attention to regarding providing them support in accessing college. Additionally, a challenge of college advisors is having limited budgets and resources.

A school's budget and priorities are linked to how the school is staffed (Hardin, 2016). School principals to an extent have the authority to decide how to utilize the school's budget to serve the needs of the school (Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2017). While some schools are fortunate to have a college advisor on staff many schools are not. Even the schools who do utilize budget money to staff a college advisor often only have enough money for the advisor's salary and not enough to provide the advisor with a

college programming budget (Perna et al., 2008). Many public school college advisors take on the challenge of spreading awareness about higher education and providing college access to students without having funding to support the efforts (Perna et al., 2008). In addition to not having college programming budgets, many schools also do not have the resources to focus on early college programming, such as providing specialized college entrance exam preparation. Underserved students have historically scored low on college entrance exams such as the SAT and ACT (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2010). Without the school providing students with test preparation, many students will continue to score low thus making it a challenge for college advisors to assist students in gaining admission to, and funding for, 4-year higher education institutions. A brief overview of the challenges college advisors face has been provided. In the following section, the different professional positions that engage in college advising are described to better understand who does college advising and how.

The Professionals who College Advise

Various professionals engage in college advising and include independent educational consultants (IEC), community-based organization college advisors, federal TRIO program college advisors, school counselors, and school college advisors. Knowing that there is a plethora of professionals providing college advising to students it is important that each receive training and support as well as be held accountable for the services they provide students. The following sections provide an examination of each of the professional college advising positions.

Independent Educational Consultant

An IEC is a professional with expertise in areas in education who is paid to guide families in making decisions pertaining to education (Bade, 2011). Independent educational consultants focus on different areas of education such as students with learning differences, and some solely focus on college admission. The Independent Educational Consultant Association (IECA) was founded in 1976 and is the national association governing IECs. To become a member of IECA one must have “a master’s degree or higher, three years of consulting or admissions experience, counseling/advisory experience with at least 50 students, dozens of evaluative campus visits, the exact number depending on the chosen specialty and professional references” (Bade, 2011, p. 17). Independent educational consultants also complete a background check during the application process for membership into the IECA (Moody, 2019). The IECs who specialize in college admission are utilized the most by affluent families (Smith & Sun, 2016).

According to Smith and Sun (2016), affluent families experience anxiety when it is time for their children to attend college because families pressure themselves to support their children in maintaining their privileged social status; many affluent families view the colleges their children attend as a reflection of the families’ upbringing. Independent educational consultants are skillful professionals who counsel families in selecting a program, school, or college that fits their student’s needs (IECA, 2020a). Smith and Sun (2016) conducted 54 interviews with families, students, and IECs to learn more about the functionality of IECs. The findings revealed that affluent families use IECs as mediators, facilitators, and guides through what families view to be a life

transition for their children. Working to provide emotional support for families, independent educational consultants assist families with navigating their expectations for their children, and the realities of their children's goals. Independent educational consultants connect families with suitable colleges for their children and help with strengthening the quality of college applications submitted.

Independent educational consultants are also hired by “many small schools, charter schools, and community academies outsourc[ing] their college consulting” (IECA, 2020b). They tend to be prior school counselors or college admission representatives (Gose, 2006). Independent educational consultants specialize in tailoring their services to focus on small caseloads of students at an individual level. They do occasional pro bono or reduced fee work but most of the time they charge for their services (Gose, 2006). This makes IECs mostly available to affluent families and not to families from middle or low-income backgrounds (Gose, 2006). Independent educational consultants offer advising services that families can pay for in a package form, a la carte, or per hour (Smith & Sun, 2016). The cost to hire an IEC in 2017 was an average of \$200 per hour and for packages in a range of \$850 and \$10,000 (Moody, 2019). Independent educational consultants work with students for a set number of hours on college applications, essays, exam preparation, financial aid, and college selection (Gose, 2006).

In 2019, a college admission scandal was exposed involving a family who paid an IEC \$25 million for assistance with cheating on college admission exams as well as gaining admittance to elite, highly competitive, higher education institutions with the false representation of the student as an athlete being recruited for a sport (Camera, 2019). The individuals involved in the case faced charges of bribery as well as fraud. The

college admission scandal of 2019, referred to as the “Varsity Blues” (Davies, 2021), is an example of a challenge that arises for IECs: affluent families attempting to use IECs to buy their way into college instead of using IECs to guide them through strengthening their applications.

Community-Based Organization College Advisor

Community-based organizations (CBO) are not-for-profit programs that are dedicated to serving a community need (Caldwell et al., 2015; Coles, 2012). There are CBOs that have the mission of providing college access to underserved students (Aidman & Malerba, 2015). Over 2,500 college access organizations nationwide support underserved students with pursuing higher education (National College Access Program Directory, 2013). According to Simmons and Hewitt (2018), “college access organizations provide complementary college advising and information transfer, often alongside mentoring interventions, to address vulnerable students’ limited opportunities for acquiring information and social capital” (p. 119). College access organizations expose students to the variety of college options available, such as private and public higher education institutions, and facilitate campus tours as well (Simmons & Hewitt, 2018). Examples of college access CBOs serving in central Texas are BreakThrough Austin and College Forward (E3 Alliance, 2017). College access CBOs can provide students with support that schools and higher education institutions often do not have the capacity for (Coles, 2012). However, CBOs have a limited number of students they can serve on a caseload (Aidman and Malerba, 2015), thus making CBOs strategic about which students to recruit for their programs. Community-based organizations tend to only serve portions of student populations within schools and colleges. Students must apply to

become a participant of the CBO, meet an eligibility criterion, and be selected to receive services from the CBO. Community-based organizations place college advisors in high schools for a select number of days each week to work with their assigned student caseload. The college advisors utilize after school time to work with students. Having a significantly smaller caseload of students compared to school counselors, CBO college advisors can form working-relationships with students and families, thus allowing college advisors to know the needs of families as well as the hardships they encounter daily (Coles, 2012). This relationship and knowledge aids CBO college advisors in supporting families in eliminating barriers to higher education.

Federal TRIO Program College Advisor

Upward Bound was the first federal college access program created in 1964, in response to the United States' War on Poverty (United States Department of Education, 2011). By the end of the 1960s, Talent Search and Student Support Services emerged forming the original TRIO of programs designated to serve disadvantaged students. As of 1998, eight programs are classified as federal, national TRIO programs: Upward Bound, Talent Search, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, Veterans Upward Bound, Training Program for Federal TRIO programs, Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement, and Upward Bound Math/Science (United States Department of Education, 2020). Seven of the eight TRIO programs serve students directly with support for accessing, persisting in, and graduating from college. Over 820,000 students nationwide were served by TRIO programs in the 2017 fiscal year (Dortch, 2018). TRIO programs are required by law to serve at least two-thirds of students coming from family incomes at 150% or less of the federal poverty level as well

as having neither parent hold a bachelor's degree (Dortch, 2018). Unfortunately, TRIO programs have a limited amount of funds thus only allowing them to serve 10% of students who are eligible to be served (Jean & New England Board of Higher Education, 2011).

TRIO programs are challenged by having to limit the number of students they admit to their programs for college access services. The grant funding TRIO receives sets restrictions on how many students the programs can serve along with who can be served: funding is not allowed to be used for students who are undocumented immigrants. TRIO programs only serve a small portion of schools' student populations thus creating a disconnect between the TRIO college advisors and the rest of the school's population. TRIO programs historically have had regulations that cause programs to be "nearly invisible to the majority of faculty and staff who did not interact with them...[and] their lack of interaction with general student concerns, resulted in limited opportunities...to develop relationships that might lead to collaborations" (Beasley, 2018, p. 15). This disconnect is a challenge because college advisors need access to their students which sometimes means having to pull students from classes for college advising meetings. Having a positive rapport between school faculty, staff, and TRIO college advisors assists TRIO college advisors with gaining access to meeting with students and support in helping the school's students access higher education. As a team, TRIO college advisors and school staff and faculty can work together to send consistent, positive messaging to students regarding pursuing higher education.

Nonetheless, research has revealed the positive effects TRIO programs have on higher education outcomes for students (Ohrtman, 2016). Graham (2011) reflected on her

experiences in high school being a part of the Upward Bound program. Upward Bound offered her specialized college preparation courses and tutoring in subjects such as math, science, and literature over the summer and on Saturdays during the school year. During her senior year, Upward Bound helped her study for the ACT college entrance exam, access fee waivers for standardized tests, and college admission applications as well as attend a financial aid workshop that helped her in completing her college financial aid application. Graham was a part of the Student Support Services program which helped her persist in college and complete her undergraduate degree. She then joined the McNair Scholars program which supported her in gaining admission to masters and doctoral programs, as well as followed her through the completion of both degrees. McNair Scholars provided Graham with a faculty mentor as well as guided her in learning how to conduct research. Graham stated, “I have found with TRIO programs I was given the resources, preparation, and support to succeed both professionally and personally for my academic pursuits” (p. 38). A strong resource that TRIO programs provide are college advisors. TRIO college advisors serve a designated caseload of eligible students. Unlike TRIO college advisors, school counselors serve significantly larger caseloads and are not able to solely focus on advising students about college.

School Counselor

There is an organized, formal process to becoming a public school counselor. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is the national organization for school counselors. The ASCA leads the school counseling field and uses its national standards to guide school counseling certification programs (ASCA, 2019). Many states have a two-year teaching requirement for aspiring school counselors meaning that school counselors

must possess a teaching certification and have taught in a classroom for at least two years prior to becoming a school counselor (ASCA, 2018). Aspiring school counselors must pass a certification exam, attain a master's degree in school counseling, as well hold a school counseling certification (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). A requirement to achieve a master's in school counseling and certification in Texas is completing a 300-hour school counseling practicum. One hundred of the 300 hours must be direct student counseling. Once becoming certified as a school counselor, the school counseling certification has ongoing, in-service, professional development requirements to remain certified. Depending on the state, school counselors are required to earn a specified amount of continuing PD hours to renew their certification (Davis, 2003). In Texas, the Texas Education Agency regulates the school counseling certification and every five years the school counselor is required to renew their certification (ASCA, 2018). Renewal of the certification consists of paying a fee and submitting proof of completing at least 200 hours of continuing education credits.

The high school counselor role supports the functioning of a school as well as promotes a healthy school environment that encourages student learning (O'Connor, 2018). A study involving school counseling programs in six states was conducted and the findings revealed that school counselors have a positive impact on school attendance, discipline, and student achievement (Carey & Dimmit, 2012). The high school counselor provides "direct services to students and their families through career education, college and career counseling services, academic support, [and] parent communication" (p. 150). The school counselor role has responsibilities like those of school psychologists and social workers, which involve supporting and developing students' mental health

(O'Connor, 2018). Additional school counselor duties tend to include administrative duties indirectly related to their role, such as facilitating school-wide standardized testing and student course scheduling.

College advising has traditionally been one of the many duties of the school counselor as well (Christian et al., 2017). Unfortunately, many school counselors are overwhelmed by their duties and feel that they are not able to effectively meet all their students' needs (O'Connor, 2018). College admission advising is not a primary role of school administrators because, in the past, high school graduates' direct enrollment in college had not been a part of the school accountability system (McDonough, 2004b). The duty of college advising fell into the lap of school counselors as it is assumed that they can incorporate this task into their workload being that they are already guiding students academically. The assumption that school counselors can provide college advising to their caseload of students, along with the reality that many school counselors are inadequately trained and do not have the capacity to focus on college advising in addition to the other demands of their job, proves a strain on school counselors nationwide (McDonough, 2004a).

In 2019, House Bill 3 passed in Texas incorporating the graduation requirement of each high school senior submitting a federal or state student financial aid application as of the 2020-2021 school year (Texas Education Agency, 2019). This graduation requirement requires public schools to assign more focus and accountability on college advising as applying for financial aid is part of college advising. College and career advising is a student need that school counselors are not able to designate significant amounts of effort and time to. Even though, a study's findings revealed that counselors

effectively complete the requirements of their role when they have small student caseloads, many schools have more than 250 students assigned to one counselor (McIntosh, 2009). The “standard counseling model” (Stephan, 2013, p. 130) makes high student-to-counselor ratios worse because it calls for counselors to meet with students individually. Counselors individually meeting with students means that fewer students can be served as opposed to a group advising setting. In response to having high student-to-counselor ratios and wanting to designate more of an effort towards offering college advising to students, some colleges and school districts have implemented the college advisor role to specifically create and run the school’s college advising program.

A mixed methods study was conducted by Matthews (2017) to evaluate a high school academic advisor program funded by a community college. The researcher worked to assess the effectiveness of the program in increasing high school student participation in dual credit enrollment classes. The community college-employed advisors stationed in high schools not only significantly increased dual credit enrollment and participation, but also “addressed college advising weaknesses commonly attributed to contemporary guidance counseling models employed at most public high schools” (Matthews, 2017, pp. 70-71). Themes that arose from the study included advisors being accessible to students as well as offering them coaching and advising. It was also evident in the data that students identify the advisors as having the strongest, positive influence on their choice to participate in dual enrollment courses when compared to their parents, teachers, and school guidance counselors. Matthews (2017) found that “because the embedded advisors were focused solely on career counseling and academic advising leading to dual enrollment participation, they were effectively liberated from the clerical

and administrative responsibilities that frequently burden high school counselors” (p. 23). Similar to higher education institutions creating the embedded advisor role in high schools to specifically focus on college advising, some school districts have developed the school college advisor role. For the purposes of this study, the school college advisor is referred to as a professional hired directly by a school or school district to advise students with pursuing higher education.

High School College Advisor

In 2002, the Susan and Michael Dell Foundation gifted \$994,775.00 for the Project ADVANCE (Assess, Decide, Visit, Apply Now for your College Education) grant to the Austin Independent School District (AISD) (Alderete, 2006). This grant funded a Project ADVANCE College Advisor at each of the AISD high schools to increase students’ college access. These college advisors solely worked on college access initiatives for students specifically “provid[ing] opportunities for students to visit college and university campuses...suppl[ing] in-depth postsecondary preparation, financial aid, and scholarship information to high school students, parents, and teachers...and provid[ing] students with individualized advisement” (Alderete, 2006, p. 1). In 2015, the Houston Independent School District (HISD) was awarded \$8,500,000.00 in grants to support college readiness (HISD Communications, 2015). Twenty-eight college advisors and 15 college advisor managers were hired and placed at campuses throughout the school district. According to HISD Communications (2015), “these advisors...have one primary mission: ensuring students get into college” (para. 8). In 2017, HISD was awarded an additional \$13,000,000.00 in grant money to continue the expansion of their college access programs working to provide individualized support for students in

pursuing higher education (HISD Communications, 2017). An example of a college advisor role description for HISD is described as “assist[ing] students in accessing and completing a post-secondary education...one-on-one advising and provid[ing] additional college and career supports, such as invitations to college visits, [and] assistance with scholarship applications” (HISD, 2020, para. 1-9). The creation of the school college advisor role is becoming a growing trend within schools. Research and literature on the school college advisor role is limited. With this growing trend, it is important to understand how college advisors are trained and professionally supported (Clayton, 2019).

What is the Training to Prepare College Advisors?

For this study, training is referred to as the ways in which professionals are prepared and educated to provide college advising to students. Training is engaged in out of preparation prior to professionals entering a role as well as occurs during their first year serving in the role. The following section gives an overview of the process to becoming a college advisor and what training currently looks like in the college advising field.

What are the Steps to Becoming a College Advisor?

There is not currently a set pathway for becoming a college advisor like how there is for becoming a school counselor. It is important to note that a key differentiation between school counselors and college coaches is that

School counselors are school professionals. They must meet state educational and certification requirements, many were former teachers, and they often belong to professional organizations. In contrast, coaches...[are] hired largely because of

their experience outside of schools (Stephan, 2013, p. 42).

In looking at college advisor position announcements, previously reviewed in Chapter I from the Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School, HISD, and the Noble Network of Charter Schools, and reviewing Clayton's (2019) study, the college advisor position does not have a set requirement for educational background other than requiring any type of bachelor's degree. Many college advisors attain only a bachelor's degree often in subjects not directly connected to serving students within a school setting. Also, a degree in high school college advising does not exist. Currently only college counseling certificates are offered at a few selected higher education institutions (Tremblay, 2014). Another step to becoming a college advisor at a high school is being hired by the school's principal. At public high schools principals oversee hiring staff.

Uncertainty in the Hiring Process

The concern was raised that people who are not involved in the counseling field may try to come in to evaluate the field and not effectively evaluate because they do not understand the mission and goals of the field (Vacc & Charkow, 1999). School principals are an example of leaders who are not connected to counseling services yet have the authority on their school campuses to evaluate their counselors and determine if they will remain in their positions. This is problematic because without knowledge of college advising strategies, college application processes, and policies impacting college access, it is difficult for the principal to know what qualities to look for when hiring a college advisor. A study examining teacher hiring found that the principals in the study did "not use consistent processes and vary the hiring approach based on their opinion of conditions...[and that there is] a disconnect between research-based best practices for

teacher hiring and the actual processes used by principals” (Kimbrel, 2019, p. 12). When principals do not have a strong understanding of policies, procedures, and barriers in the college access world they increase the likelihood of college advisors having full autonomy within their position without providing guidance and support to the college advisor. A downside to this is that autonomy without support can often lead to abandonment (Burton, 2012). College advisors are left on their own to navigate serving the college access needs of students and tend to not be closely evaluated on competencies related to college advising.

Counselors are often not trained in college advising prior to working at a high school therefore once at the high school they have to seek out opportunities to gain college advising knowledge (McDonough, 2005). This can be problematic because the college counselor may not seek out professional development on college advising on their own. There is no one holding them accountable for growing their college advising knowledge and skills. The principals put their trust in the college advisors to run and make judgement calls about the school’s college advising program without providing guidance.

Schools’ third-party college access organizations tend to have more structure and accountability for providing training to college advisors. The College Advising Corps (n.d.) is a college access organization that has partnered with 29 higher education institutions to provide college advisors to high schools. Advise TX is a branch of the College Advising Corps and is made up of college advisors who recently graduated from one of the partner Texas higher education institutions (Texas A&M University, 2020). According to the NACAC Directory of College Access and Success Programs (2020),

“Advise TX advisers receive intensive training before serving in a high school, completing a six-week practical curriculum that focuses on college access, college admissions, financial aid, student services, diversity, community service, and professionalism” (para. 1). Similar to Advise TX, TRIO has a training program specifically for the staff of TRIO programs (United States Department of Education, 2020). College access organizations that are connected to higher education institutions such as Advise TX and TRIO typically hire staff who have recently graduated from college. These organizations tend to provide structured training in college advising to their staff compared to what public schools provide to their college advisors. There is a strong need for consistent, structured training in the college advisor field.

The Need for Training

Several states have requirements for the school counselor certification but even within the requirements counselors typically do not get in-depth college advising training nor complete an academic program tailored to college access (Simmons, 2014). School college advisors typically do not receive formal college advising training thus causing them to rely on learning once in the role (Clayton, 2019; Gilfillan, 2017). Even though college advisors at a charter school had positive intent for assisting students in gaining college admission, college advisors lacked resources and competencies in college advising (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). College advising is so new that “professional development lags and there is insufficient research to determine how to most effectively train counselors for this work, especially for an urban setting” (Brown et al., 2016, p. 14). There is a strong need for regulation of training, support, and accountability within the college advising field.

The Need for National, Professional Standards

In 1997, Campbell and Dahir conducted a study to learn about the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) attitudes regarding creating national standards for school counselors. Their survey instrument served to gauge attitudes on the development of national standards for school counseling programs, the intent of the standards, and which content areas to include (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). The findings of the study revealed that ASCA was in support of the creation, believed that national standards would declare what is important within the field, and would aid with determining what areas school counselors need to continuously develop. ASCA's national standards are used to build and guide master's programs in school counseling. The American School Counselor Association's standards are also used by state education agencies, such as the Texas Education Agency, to influence the requirements for counselors renewing their school counseling certifications. This is discussed further in a later section. Regarding accountability, the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) is not as influential in the college advising field as ASCA is for school counseling.

The National Association for College Admission Counseling was founded in 1937, originally under the name of the Association of College Admission Counselors (ACAC) (NACAC, n.d.a). One decade after ACAC's founding, it hosted its first full association conference consisting only of higher education institution membership. By 1950, ACAC had 140 colleges in membership. In 1955, ACAC expanded its membership to also include high schools. ACAC received a name change in 1968 to the National Association of College Admissions Counselors. In 1972, the National Association of

College Admissions Counselors hosted its first college fair. The association experienced its last name change in 1995, being named the National Association for College Admission Counseling to represent the diversity of its members. In 1990, NACAC came out with a set of competencies that college admission counselors and school counselors should attain if they are supporting students who are entering college (NACAC, 1990). The competencies were intended to be used to guide the creation of counselor job descriptions, in-service professional development, and mentorship. The competencies were also established to offer guidance on what needs to be included in school and admission counselors' training such as standardized college entrance exam education, strategies for supporting students through the college search and submitting college applications. It was also recommended for school counseling master's programs to require the completion of a practicum consisting of actual experience assisting students to access college (NACAC, 1990). The organization makes an "ongoing effort to inform the association and the public about the state of college counseling in America's high schools" (McDonough, 2005). They also attempt to lead the college counseling field, yet NACAC has shown to not have enough power yet to regulate college counseling. The National Association for College Admission Counseling is limited to only serving institutions that are affiliated members (Hodum, 2012).

The National Association for College Admission Counseling is an optional association for college advisors to participate in. There are no state requirements mandating that college advisors engage with NACAC nor abide by NACAC's professional standards and competencies. The National Association for College Admission Counseling recently changed its policies on discouraging its higher education

institution members from using incentives to encourage students to apply early decision to their institutions (Jump, 2020). The United States Department of Justice pressured NACAC to change its early decision policies or be in jeopardy of being shut down. The National Association for College Admission Counseling changed its policies as of September 2019 to be in accordance with this mandate. Even though NACAC had to remove the policies from its Code of Ethics, NACAC still highly discourages its members to engage in early decision incentives (Jump, 2020). It is evident that NACAC as an association does not have authority over its members or institutions that are not members to enforce its policies because two higher education institution members had been using early decision incentives (Jaschik, 2019). The National Association of College Admission Counseling's professional standards are more applicable to college admission than to college access as they cover items such as ethics in college admission, significant dates in college admission, and procedures regarding admission waitlists and early decisions (NACAC, 2018). There are also no requirements of college advisors by the state to engage in a set number of PD hours to renew a college advising certification because this type of credential is not currently required of most college advisors. Moreover, detailed data on school counselors and college advisors are not collected at the state or national level (McDonough, 2005) despite school counselors and college advisors providing direct services to students; yet their work is not systematically evaluated. The following section provides an overview of the current support within the college advising field.

What is the Support for College Advisors?

For this study, support is referred to as the ongoing PD and guidance college advisors receive once in the college advisor role for over a year. Professional development occurs in different forms and can be engaged in at varying levels such as: individual, group, and departmental (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Individual PD consists of professionals partaking in PD on their own to enhance their skills. Attending a webinar is an example of individual PD. Webinars are online seminars providing PD on varying topics and are accessible to individuals with internet access around the world (Sull, 2015). Group PD is when several individuals come together to learn more about a shared professional interest topic (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). This form of PD tends to be voluntary, and examples are professionals electing to take a course together and participate in learning communities. Professional learning communities encourage faculty and staff to collaborate and engage in PD jointly through learning from each other (Avidov-Ungar, 2018). Departmental PD is often a mandated requirement of organizations that are experiencing job-related challenges. Staff who work on a team are required to engage in the PD together.

There are formal, informal, and nonformal types of PD (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Engaging in intentional opportunities such as “classes, specific workshops, or designed learning opportunities, often for credit” (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998, p. 9) are considered formal PD. Informal PD “includes observing, job shadowing, learning by example, and many mentoring activities” (p. 9). Nonformal PD embraces a variety of sources of activities such as “brown bag lunches, speakers, departmental training program...” (p. 9). Nonformal PD is often when learning takes place in less-structured

environments.

Most schools require their faculty and staff to acquire varying amounts of continuing education credits each year (Reaser, 2016) by engaging in formal PD. College advisors and school counselors are a part of the school's staff and attend PD events together. Oftentimes the continuing education credits requirement is intentionally broad allowing for faculty and staff to select approved opportunities that they see fit. Training modules are an example of an online PD activity. Conferences are typically hosted in-person, are PD events consisting of multiple sessions centered on different themes (Raciti, 2017), and often there are costs to attend. However, "too often the professional development available to our [educators] consists of fragmented, one-shot workshops, at which teachers passively listen to experts that are detached from the practice of teaching" (Reed, 2000, p. 117). Single PD opportunities that do not have follow-up or continue as a series do not have strong evidence of being effective for teachers. It is important to note that Reed's study is mentioned because for a few days out of the school year college advisors, school counselors, and teachers are often grouped together to attend the PD sessions offered by the school. School counselor "effectiveness is only possible by meeting counselors' preservice and in-service professional development needs" (McDonough, 2005, p. 12), thus stressing the importance of PD being tailored to serve the needs of counselors.

The Need for More Support

College advisors do not typically have specific ongoing PD requirements from school administration, professional associations, and certification programs (Clayton, 2019). The ASCA (1997) stated that the increasing needs of all groups served by

counselors will require counselors to continuously develop their professional competencies. They also noted that ongoing training and supervision is a requirement of professional certified organizations at the national level. The same can be applied to college advisors, to meet the growing needs of students, college advisors must participate in ongoing PD (Clayton, 2019).

Training individuals on how to be a counselor at the start of their careers is equally important to ensuring ongoing PD during their careers. Professional development enables counselors to continue to enhance the services they provide to students including staying updated on policies and trends affecting students. Hackney (1992) discovered that the school counselors who recently went through a school counselor preparation program are more likely to use multiple, updated theories to guide their work. School counselors who have completed their counselor preparation program several years ago tend to use a single theory to guide their work. Students are constantly evolving and the issues they encounter while navigating school change over time. School counselors utilizing outdated theories that were applicable to students decades ago may no longer be the most effective for helping students today. Medical doctors are expected to stay up to date on the latest advances in medicine with the goal of providing the most effective/efficient, less-invasive treatment as possible to patients. School counselors assist with student development and the maintenance of students' mental health; therefore, they too should have knowledge of the latest theories that they can use to guide students. Myrick (1987) found in a study that school counselors' work starts to become so routine that they really do not have to think about what they are doing. Much of school counselors' work becomes part of their common sense, meaning that many do not seek out new theories for guidance. This

common sense relates to what Kahneman (2011) referred to as “system one thinking”. As it currently stands, the field of school counseling appears to have a hegemonic approach: an educator attends graduate school, attains a school counselor certification, and becomes a professional school counselor. School counselors need to be challenged to become lifelong learners who are encouraged to continue their acquisition of counseling skills. Clawson (1995) asserted that “in counseling, the most important training dynamic is the demonstration of theory-to-practice transference” (p. 1). This finding supports the need for counselors to understand multiple theories to apply to and guide their work, thus revealing counselors only having knowledge of a single theory to utilize as problematic, especially considering all the duties they are assigned to do.

A qualitative study was conducted to learn about school counselors’ assigned duties, their perception of their level of preparedness to do the duties, and the effect of their college preparation and in-service professional development on their execution of duties (Davis, 2003). In establishing the need for her study, Davis included that the state of New Jersey was going to require school counselors to complete 100 hours of PD for the renewal of their school counseling certifications. Davis sought to learn what PD needs school counselors have with the hope that the findings would aid their new PD requirements in offering options to meet these needs. A survey, focus group, and individual interviews were administered to secondary school counselors within two New Jersey public school districts. Davis developed the survey to administer to participants based on the American School Counseling Association’s (1997) counseling program national standards. Bringing in the national standards allowed Davis to see if there was a relationship between counselor’s duties, current professional development, and the

national standards. The findings from the study revealed that counselors feel that their on-the-job work experience, followed by college internships, contributed most to their preparedness for the duties of a school counselor (Davis, 2003). Counselors felt they could do their job more effectively with a reduced caseload size. College preparation aided more with theories for working with students. School mandated professional development does not help with providing services to students and counselors feel that professional organizations for counselors contributed most to their professional development (Davis, 2003).

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (2019) also sought to learn about school counselors' and college advisors' perceptions of their level of preparedness to advise students on transferring colleges. NACAC (2019) surveyed 2,251 school counselors and college advisors from public, private, and parochial schools to learn about their perspectives regarding how confident they felt advising students on transferring from a community college to a 4-year university. Less than 40% of respondents reported that they felt well-prepared. This study shows the need for PD for college advisors. Training on the transfer process from a community college to a 4-year university could build college advisors' confidence as well as provide college advisors with the knowledge needed to inform and assist students in the transferring process.

An ethnographic study was facilitated by Knight and Marciano (2013) to learn about the factors impacting working-class, Black and Latina/o students' process in accessing college. The study's findings highlighted the importance of school guidance counselors using culturally relevant practices in assisting students in pursuing college. While it is recommended that professionals assisting students in accessing college utilize

culturally relevant practices to support students, it is not clear how professionals learn what culturally relevant practices are, or how to engage in PD related to culturally responsive pedagogy. A future study can examine how counselors are trained on or engage in PD related to culturally relevant practices for college admission. In the following section the researchers advise that providing college admission PD to all school staff is beneficial to aiding more school staff in engaging with students in effective conversations about accessing college.

In *Expanding College Access for Urban Youth*, the argument was built for the importance of having strong partnerships between primary, secondary, and post-secondary education (Howard et al., 2016). The researchers recommended that all school faculty and staff have knowledge of the college admission process to be able to assist students. Students from marginalized backgrounds tend to lack mentors in their lives who have college admission knowledge. With more school officials having this knowledge, they can serve as additional resources to students thus working to eliminate students' sole reliance on one source for college information: their college advisor. In the effort of ensuring that all school staff and faculty can discuss college with students, the researchers recommended "providing additional time for more professional development opportunities for counselors and teachers to become better aware of changes and updates in college admissions requirements" (p. 141). College admission requirements frequently change. Without intentionally reviewing data about admission requirement changes one may not know how to guide students to achieve college admission or could misadvise students during the application process. A school district set a goal for school counselors and college access advisors to engage in making more data-informed decisions.

An exploratory study was conducted to learn how approaches to human performance improvement can be utilized by school district leadership in supporting school counselors and college access advisors in making more data-informed decisions (Viera & Freer, 2015). The findings revealed that counselors and advisors feel they have a “lack of clear guidance and direction for conducting systematic approaches central to data-driven decision making and continuous improvement” (Viera & Freer, 2015, p. 33) as well as a “need for additional training in accessing data and in decision making based on data analysis” (p.33). While counselors and advisors have access to data systems that aid in making data-informed decisions impacting students, counselors and advisors are not sure how to utilize these systems and need PD on making data-informed decisions.

Policies and Stakeholders

In May 2015, the state of Texas passed House Bill 18 which called for The University of Texas at Austin to create an accessible resource for counselors and advisors supporting students in post-secondary and career planning (The University of Texas at Austin, 2018a). Texas recognized the lack of postsecondary and career guidance PD support for counselors and responded to this need with the creation of Texas OnCourse. The Texas OnCourse Academy is a platform with online training and information free to counselors, educators, school administrators, and families (The University of Texas at Austin, 2018b). The platform has online modules detailing high school graduation requirements, the college admission process, career planning, and information on joining the military. While Texas OnCourse is a resource available to professionals guiding students through the college admission process, it is not mandated that professionals utilize the resource. The Texas Education Agency is a stakeholder for professional

development support to public school counselors and college advisors. The Texas Education Agency is an organization that educators gain their certification through to become student support staff, such as counselors and librarians (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). The Texas Education Agency could implement a mandate like the law passed in 2017 in Michigan requiring school counselors to complete at least 50 training hours in college and career guidance as a part of their renewal of their school counseling certification every five years (West, 2020). Another stakeholder within the college advising field is NACAC. The following section provides more information about NACAC.

The mission of NACAC is to “define professional standards and provide leadership, knowledge, advocacy, research, and a forum for collaboration to support admission and counseling professionals” (NACAC, 2016, p. 1). The organization is currently a leader in providing PD options to college admission and advising professionals. The National Association for College Admission Counseling is also an official continuing education provider deemed by the National Board for Certified Counselors (NACAC, n.d.b), offering ongoing PD for college admission staff as well as school counselors in varying forms: webinars, e-learning courses, conferences, special interest groups, networking opportunities, and social media communities (Cox, 2018; Dobson, 2018; Ogawa, 2018;). While NACAC intends to provide opportunities to professionals on the higher education side, as well as secondary school side, it puts most of its focus on developing college admission staff. NACAC catering to higher education admission professionals more than secondary school professionals may have to do with the fact that it was initially created to serve only the college admissions side.

The National Association for College Admission Counseling developed competencies that the association uses as their professional standards, but these standards are not implemented as a requirement for college advisors. Like NACAC, the College Board is also a large organization that works to provide access to higher education and has also created guidelines for college advising (College Board, 2010).

In 2010, the College Board created the Eight Components of College and Career Readiness Counseling to provide a framework for counselors to use in building equitable college access programming. College Board's Eight Components are (1) college aspirations, (2) academic planning for college and career readiness, (3) enrichment and extracurricular engagement, (4) college and career exploration and selection processes, (5) college and career assessments, (6) college affordability planning, (7) college and career admission processes, and (8) transition from high school graduation to college enrollment (College Board, 2010). The College Board provided its affiliated schools with these guiding components but like NACAC are not able to ensure that college advisors follow them. The College Board also offers PD opportunities to school professionals in the forms of webinars and conferences.

The College Board facilitates webinars for counselors covering varying topics such as college entrance exam information sessions and best practices for assisting students with applying for financial aid (College Board, 2020b). Webinars are free for affiliated members to attend virtually. The College Board hosts eight national conferences with a focus on college access for specific diverse populations which are hosted throughout the year by the College Board at locations across the United States (College Board, 2020a). College advisors as well as college admission staff are invited to

participate as attendees as well as presenters. In 2019, the College Board piloted the College Board Regional Fellowship program offering school college advisors the opportunity to apply for a fellowship covering all expenses to attend one of the national College Board conferences based on the advisors' interests (College Board, 2019). Webinars and conferences are examples of PD support offered to professionals engaged in college advising. Other forms of support are college counselor updates and college counselor fly-ins.

College Counselor Updates and Fly-Ins

College counselor updates are hosted by the admission team of higher education institutions. These events tend to be held at restaurants located in major cities where the colleges work to recruit students. It is common for multiple colleges to come together to host college counselors for short, individual college admission and financial aid presentations, then serve a meal to counselors as a token of appreciation for their time (Lamar University, 2019; Texas State University, 2019; University of Houston, 2019). It is at these college counselor updates where college counselors are provided with new information on university admission policies and opportunities for the upcoming school year (University of Houston, 2019). These updates provide college counselors with an insight on how to help their students apply for admission as well as build relationships with college admission staff. College counselor updates are free to attend but have limited space capacity depending on the venues where they are held (Lamar University, 2019). College counselors are invited to attend college counselor updates by hosting institutions as well as by word-of-mouth from college counselor colleagues. While attending college counselor updates can be informative sometimes leaving school and

being away from campus for half a day presents a challenge to college counselors as it takes them away from their duties at the school. College counselor fly-ins are like college counselor updates in the sense that the intent of both is to inform counselors about colleges and their admission requirements.

College counselor fly-ins are events either hosted by individual or multiple colleges where college counselors are invited to visit the college's campus, tour, interact with students, faculty, and staff, and experience the college's offerings first-hand (University of Houston, 2019). Many of the colleges will host these events covering all travel, meal, and lodge expenses for counselors (College Greenlight, 2016). College counselors are given celebrity treatment at the colleges often attending special student information panel presentations, five-course meals with the college's president, and being given presents to take home with them such as college spirit items. The hope is for the college counselors to learn about the college, enjoy their time on the college's campus, and in return have their students apply to attend the college. These fly-ins benefit college counselors by exposing them to various higher education institutions and broadening their knowledge of different options available to students (College Greenlight, 2016). Colleges that host fly-ins tend to specifically target college counselors to invite based on the schools that colleges are most interested in recruiting students from. This means that not all college counselors have an equal chance at being selected to attend a fly-in. College counselors who work at schools with a history of students not attending college as well as students performing low on college entrance exams are presented with less college counselor fly-in invitation opportunities. The previous sections provided an overview of existing PD within the college advising field. Next the challenges of PD

within the college advising field are assessed.

Challenges with PD for College Advising

Lack of funding, support, and time are challenges that impact the PD of college advisors. The National Association for College Admission Counseling and the College Board each charge membership fees to be a part of their organizations. College advisors' affiliated organizations must have a membership to fully utilize all their PD support opportunities. This membership fee can be a barrier for some college advisors as many operate without a PD budget. Not all college advisors have the financial support to be members of associations or attend conferences. Another challenge that can be encountered by college advisors is not having a supervisor who is in support of growing the college advisor professionally. When a professional's supervisor does not promote PD opportunities and is not in support of their staff pursuing PD events, the professional may encounter a difficult time participating in PD during work hours as well as gaining financial support. There is also the issue of college advisors' supervisors not knowing what kind of PD support best aligns with college advising thus causing them the risk of having college advisors engage in PD irrelevant to college advising thus poorly utilizing college advisors' already limited time. Lastly, with the demands that come with high student-to-counselor ratios, college advisors have limited time to serve all students' college access needs. Setting aside time to pursue PD opportunities is a challenge. The next section provides a review of the gaps in the literature and concludes with the study's theoretical framework.

Gaps in the Literature

As the college advising profession continues to grow, regarding more college advisor positions being created in schools throughout the nation, it is crucial that college advisors are qualified to work with students (Clayton, 2019). It has yet to be truly determined what qualifies a professional to serve as a college advisor. According to Simmons (2011), “the dearth of meaningful college counseling for vulnerable students underscores a critical gap in education policy” (p. 122). Standards have not been implemented to guide the accountability, training, and support of college advisors. There are mandated requirements to becoming a certified school counselor and keeping the certification active. College advising is a duty of school counselors which is why the literature review has looked at school counselors’ training and PD to essentially compare school counselors to college advisors. There are not mandated requirements to become a college advisor which is concerning as college advisors tend to work with vulnerable populations that they are not educated and trained to guide (Clayton, 2019). It is important that college advisors are held accountable for PD to support the college advising field in enhancing effectively and efficiently in serving students in accessing higher education. It is crucial to learn about college advisors’ roles, and onboarding and ongoing PD to better understand their experiences and PD needs. Examining college advisors’ educational and work backgrounds, their training and support, and roles provided data to inform the college advising field of the state of college advising. The findings from this study assist in making recommendations for the college advising profession in having accountability for and building college advisors’ PD. Without this new knowledge, the college advising field is at risk of having professionals who are not

prepared to fully support underserved students in accessing college: college advisors' lack of training and support will lead to the mis-advisement of underserved students in pursuing higher education, causing underserved students harm by potentially resulting in them not attaining higher education. Previous studies have examined the impact of context on students' college decision making (Perna, 2006; Tierney & Venegas, 2009) but none have studied the roles and PD experiences of college advisors serving in high school who serve underserved students nor the ecological influences that impact their PD and roles at their schools. A study was conducted to understand the state of college advisors' PD to then be used to assist the college advising field in ensuring that college advisors are updated on policies impacting college access and aid them in supporting more underserved students to achieve higher education, thus working to end the perpetuation of familial poverty. The following section provides an explanation of the theoretical framework that guided this study.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of the research study was to learn about the roles of college advisors, working in high school contexts serving at least 50% of students from underserved backgrounds, and about their onboarding and ongoing PD experiences. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) focuses on the role that environments have on human development. The ecological systems theory guided the study by aiding with exploring and understanding the different layers of factors and interactions that directly and indirectly affect college advisors' PD.

The Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) was initially used to explain how the interactions between children and their environmental factors influence

children's development. The theory recognizes that a child is a part of different ecosystems ranging from microsystems, like their relatives, and macrosystems, such as culture. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory consists of a five-level model: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The child is placed at the center of the model and the five levels represent external factors that impact the child's development. The first level is the microsystem which is the most intimate context to the child. Within the microsystem level are the direct ecosystems that the child is a part of such as family, school, and communities that they are involved with daily. At the microsystem level interactions involve interpersonal relationships. These interpersonal relationships are the first to affect children's development. The way that children respond to their interactions in interpersonal relationships sets the foundation on how children may interact within other contexts.

The mesosystem is the second level of the model which consists of the interactions between the child's microsystems. The mesosystem level is the connections within the child's family and school. The third level is the exosystem which consists of the connections between multiple contexts that the child does not necessarily have a role in, but which indirectly affect the child. The fourth level is the macrosystem which is the largest of the ecosystems and is the system that the child is most removed from yet directly has an impact on the child. The macrosystem level is made up of cultural values, government policies, the economy, and other large overarching contexts. Lastly, the chronosystem is the fifth level of the model. The chronosystem considers how the dimension of time affects consistency and change within a child's environment. The chronosystem includes the changes and constants that occur within all levels of the

model's systems. Researchers have previously used Bronfenbrenner's theory and adapted models to study how students develop in a specific area.

Perna (2006) sought to learn how contexts directly and indirectly impact students' college decision making. The Proposed Conceptual Model of Student College Choice was created and assumes that an individual's assessment of the benefits and costs of an investment in college is shaped by the individual's habitus, as well as the school and community context, the higher education context, and the social, economic, and policy context (Perna, 2006, p. 101). Influenced by Perna's Proposed Conceptual Model of Student Choice, the Cultural Framework for Financial Aid Decision Making constructed by Tierney and Venegas (2009) elaborates on what research has discovered about students' processes for selecting colleges to attend or deciding not to attend. The researchers' framework "assumes that the various contexts in which students find themselves will have a direct impact on how they receive, interpret, and act on messages about financial aid" (Tierney & Venegas, 2009, p. 384). The model includes four environments: educational, familial, community, and out of class. Tierney and Venegas' model is applied to learn about the contexts and influences that impact the accessibility of financial aid for students as well as plays a role in students' decision-making processes about financial aid. Aspects of these models were used to guide this study's approach in examining the ecological factors impacting college advisors' roles and PD.

Arnold et al. (2012) used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological System Model to examine the role of environment and interaction on a student's college readiness development. The student was placed in the center of the model and different ecosystems and contexts such as the school, economy, school accountability policies, capitalism, and

racism were placed in the five levels. In this research study, the Ecology of College Readiness Model (Arnold et al., 2012) was modified to apply to college advisors' PD thus creating the Ecological Model of a College Advisor's Professional Development (see Figure 1). Many of the elements featured in the Ecology of College Readiness Model interact with students preparing to go to college and are like those that impact college advisors' PD. The graphic below is symbolic of the theoretical framework that guided the study from start to finish and was applied during examination of each participant who served as a case.

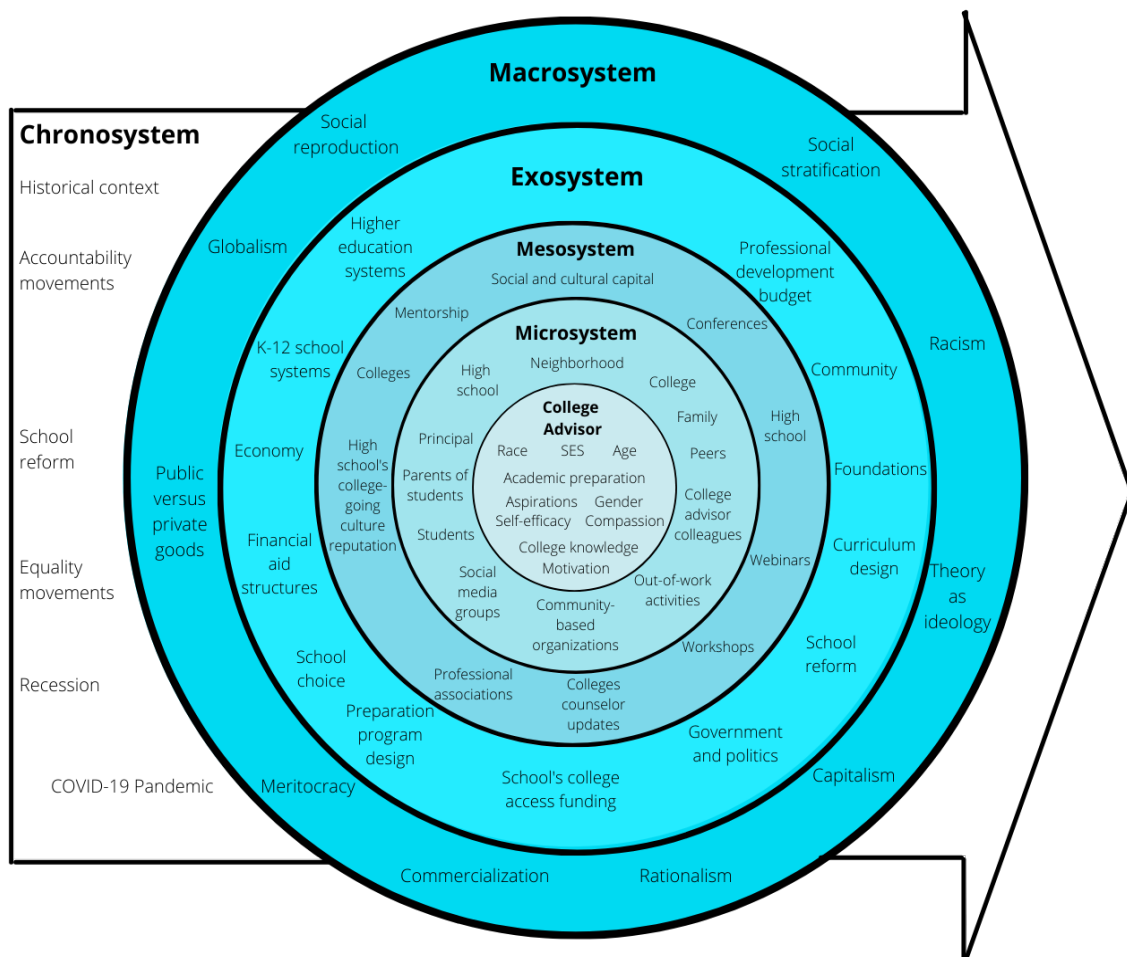


Figure 1 *Ecological Model of a College Advisor's Professional Development*

This model represents the college advisor's ecological system. At the center of the Ecological Model of a College Advisor's Professional Development (see Figure 1) is the college advisor. This individual level consists of important features that influence experiences of the college advisor such as academic preparation, college knowledge, motivation, race, and socioeconomic status. The microsystem level is made up of the college advisor's interactions within their proximate settings. College advisors' experiences within the microsystem setting can affect their academic preparation, college knowledge, and motivation. Family, college advisor colleagues, college advising preparation programs, the high school the college advisor works at, the high school principal, and social media groups are all a part of a college advisor's microsystem level. A college advisor's family may have a history of attaining higher education thus making them able to support the college advisor when they were pursuing higher education. College advisor colleagues may serve as a network to the college advisor working together to learn, share, and teach about PD in college advising. The high school the college advisor works at may have low expectations of their students to attend college thus influencing decisions to not support college advising PD. The principal who supervises the college advisor is passionate about students completing college with little debt and invests in support opportunities specific to financial aid education. All of these are examples that can occur within the microsystem level.

At the mesosystem level of a college advisor's ecological system are social and cultural capital, and support opportunities such as college counselor updates, workshops, conferences, and professional associations. College advisors' access/connection to social systems within the college advising field, such as college advising professional

associations, assist them with their wealth of knowledge about available options of higher education institutions and college advising best practices. The larger the network a college advisor has of colleagues in the college admission world as well as the better the school's college-going reputation that the college advisor works at, the more opportunities the college advisor is presented with regarding attending college counselor fly-in tours and college counselor updates.

The exosystem level is the level that acknowledges large, outside systems that impact the college advisor's PD even though they do not have contact with the college advisor. Within the exosystem level are factors such as foundations that support high schools, school choice, the economy, and K-12 school systems. While a college advisor does not directly interact with the economy, the economy impacts whether the college advisor has a job, the interest of students seeking to attend higher education, and essentially the need for college advising. A foundation attached to a school may provide a large PD budget to college advisors thus impacting the training and support opportunities available to college advisors. A K-12 school system may have an organizational structure of employing college advisors to share between high school campuses. All these influences at the exosystem have an indirect impact on college advisors' PD.

At the macrosystem level there are influences such as capitalism, meritocracy, and social stratification. The macrosystem level is the "broadest level of the environment consisting of the culture and ideology that shape social structures, opportunities, and individual expectations" (Arnold et al., 2012, p. 77). The United States' operation in systems of social stratification impacts college advisors as college advisors belong to different social groups that either benefit from the privilege or oppression of other

groups; having privilege or being oppressed in different areas impacts college advisors' access to opportunities related and unrelated to college advising.

The last level is the chronosystem level which is made up of the changes from the macrosystem level. According to Arnold et al. (2012), "these changes are a result of the movements, events, and shifting ideologies associated with historical time" (p. 83).

Influences such as the school accountability movements and the COVID-19 pandemic are in the chronosystem level. Over recent decades the school accountability movement has evolved increasing the stakes of standardized testing, having an impact on students' graduation from public high school. As college advisors are school employees their roles can be impacted by school accountability. The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted how people gather and interact as well as the higher education landscape for facilitating traditional education experiences in classrooms on college campuses. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 shifted college advising as well as conferences and workshops from in-person to virtual

Every individual is made up of an ecological system. A student has an ecological system, and a college advisor has an ecological system. In Arnold et al.'s (2012) model, the school counselor is a part of the student's ecological system at the microsystem level. As the term college advisor is not specifically included in the model this study assumes that the school counselor represents the college advisor as one of the school counselor's duties is college advising. Considering that high school college advisors are a part of students' microsystem context and have the duty to assist students with pursuing higher education, this study argues that college advisors' ecological systems impact students' ecological systems thus affecting the college access of students (see Figure 2).

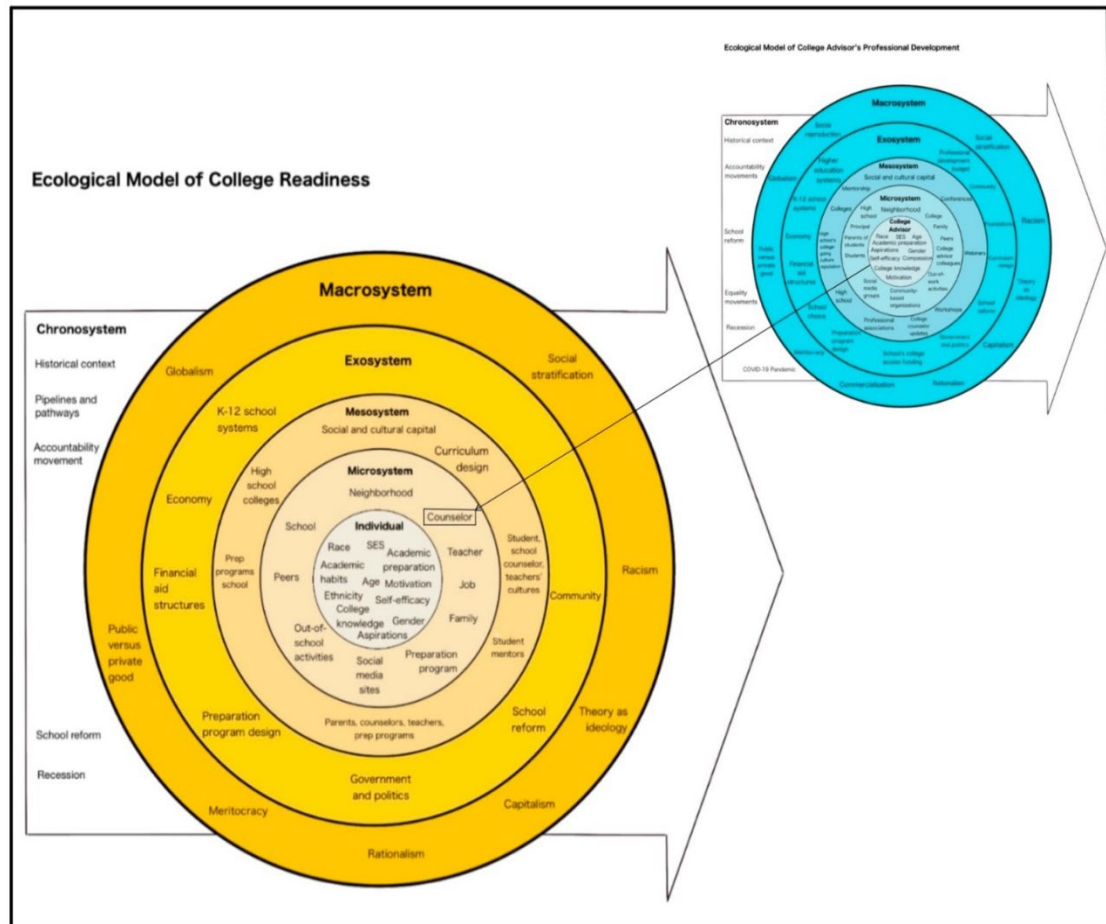


Figure 2 *A College Advisor's Impact on a Student's College Readiness*

Figure 2 includes the Ecological Model of College Readiness (Arnold et al., 2012) to the left where the college advisor is situated in the microsystem level representing the interactions regarding college advising or lack of between them and the student. The image to the right is the adapted Ecological Model of a College Advisor's Professional Development. The different influences in the contextual levels of the ecological model directly and indirectly impact college advisors' PD. Within the college advisor's ecological system, the student is a part of the college advisor's microsystem level. The arrow coming from the college advisor's ecological system pointing toward the student's microsystem level (see Figure 2) represents how the college advisor has an impact on the

student and their college access hence relating to the significance of this study: the PD of college advisors is important to understand because of the potential influence they have on students' college readiness and access. An overview of the methods utilized in this study is provided in Chapter III.

III. METHODS

Qualitative research methods were utilized for this study as the purpose was to capture the roles and onboarding and ongoing professional development experiences of college advisors working in high schools serving underserved students. In particular, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How do college advisors serving underserved students in high school contexts describe their onboarding and ongoing professional development experiences?
2. How can an ecological framework assist in understanding the factors that shape college advisors' roles within their high school contexts and professional development experiences?
3. How can the narratives of college advisors inform best practices to support them in their roles in facilitating college access for underserved students?

In effort to answer the research questions, a qualitative research design was ideal because it allowed for a complex, in-depth examination and comprehension of issues, and was used for when that level of detail could only be achieved by learning through the perspectives of people who experienced the issue being raised (Creswell, 2013).

Moreover, this form of research was fitting because qualitative research is conducted when “we want to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue” (Creswell, 2013, p. 46). It was uncovered in the study's literature review that there has not been mandated accountability for the training and support of college advisors. The study sought to understand the onboarding and ongoing PD experiences of college advisors as well as the roles they have within their schools.

The study's specific qualitative research design was a case study. Case study

research assisted in answering “how” questions as it gave thought to how a phenomenon was impacted by its situated context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Digging deeper into case study research and its different forms, this study utilized a multiple case study design (Baxter & Jack, 2008) that drew on elements of a comparative case study (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). In this multiple case study, each case had a different context (Baxter & Jack, 2008) which enabled analysis “within each setting and across settings” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 550). The multiple case study allowed for an in-depth, examination of each college advisor participant as a case. The design aided with uncovering a detailed understanding of the roles of the college advisors, discovering how the college advisors described their PD needs, what preparation experiences they had prior to entering the advising role, and in what ways the training and support they received varied by school and assigned duties.

The elements of the comparative case study utilized in this study

Encourage[d] comparison across three axes: a horizontal look that not only contrast[ed] one case with another, but also trace[d] social actors, documents, or other influences across these cases; a vertical comparison of influences at different levels, from...the national to regional and local scales; and a transversal comparison over time (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 14).

The comparison across the three axes aided in guiding the examination and analysis of the varying contextual layers that directly and indirectly impacted college advisors’ PD; considering the multiple ecological environments in which college advisors have been situated and accounted for via this study’s theoretical framework (i.e., the micro system, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Additionally, previous college access researchers (Clayton, 2019; Grim et al., 2019; Perna, et al., 2008) have successfully utilized a multiple case study and comparative case study design when they examined the work experiences of college advising professionals as well as the postsecondary goals of students from low-income backgrounds; which indicated the applicability of having utilized a multiple and comparative case study design to respond to this study's research questions.

Several case studies focused on college advisors' experiences also informed this study's design and interview protocol. For instance, Clayton's (2019) multiple case study focused on the experiences and advising practices of seven different college advising professionals working in public high schools. She examined the educational and work background, training, and practices of college advising professionals, and conducted a cross-case analysis. The themes from the data revealed that college advising professionals felt that they lacked training in college advising, especially in financial aid, felt underprepared when they began the role, learned as they were on the job, and found that having a network of colleagues from which to ask for guidance was their most helpful source of training. The findings from the study revealed that "the context of the high school and community significantly shaped the approach and focus of the college advising professionals" (p. 1417). Clayton discovered that even though all seven college advising professionals served in public high schools, that the demographics and culture of each school impacted the professionals' duties and the services they could provide for students.

Perna et al. (2008) also facilitated multiple, descriptive case studies examining college counseling at 15 public high schools. The researchers utilized a multi-level

conceptual model created by Perna (2006) and refined by Perna and Thomas (2006) to study the “contextual forces” (Perna et al., 2008, p. 135) that impacted college counseling in schools. Through the case studies and application of the conceptual model, Perna et al.’s (2008) findings confirmed that

The structure and availability of counseling at a school shapes students’ opportunity for college but that the structure and availability of counseling at a school is shaped directly and indirectly by other layers of context, including the federal and state policy context, the higher education context, and other aspects of the school context (p. 135).

Based on these findings, the researchers recommended “that structural changes (including changes in federal and state financial aid policies), district policies pertaining to counseling, and relationships with higher education institutions are required” (Perna et al., 2008, p. 133). These recommendations were to make sure that all students can receive adequate college counseling.

A comparative case study conducted by Grim et al. (2019) examined the factors that influenced American and English, low-income students’ goals for after high school. The researchers utilized Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Human Ecology Theory as a framework that guided the study and provided a lens to analyze the data from the facilitated, virtual focus groups that included students from Boston and London. Grim et al. (2019) examined the contextual factors directly and indirectly shaping American and English students’ postsecondary aspirations, compared the two groups, and revealed how the contextual factors influenced them similarly and differently. The data revealed for both American and English low-income students that “the exosystem (policy level)

influenced postsecondary aspirations, while the mesosystem (immediate support systems) influenced student choice of where to attend postsecondary education” (Grim et al., 2019, p. 833). Influences in the exosystem level indirectly impacted students while influences in the mesosystem level directly impacted students’ aspirations for the future. The following section describes the settings in which the study occurred.

High School Settings

This study examined the factors that influence college advisors’ roles and PD experiences. Specifically, this study examined the training and support experiences of high school college advisors, providing college access to underserved students, in traditional public schools, public charter schools, and private schools. These three school settings are described next.

Public Schools

According to Knight and Marciano (2013), “public schools in the 21st century serve an unprecedented, increasingly diverse population of 49 million students who come to school with multiple racial, cultural, linguistic, family, and economic backgrounds” (p. 2). Students attend public schools based on the neighborhoods they live in and their geographical boundaries that school boards created to zone students to designated schools (Dorsey & Plucker, 2016). Students attending neighborhood schools means that they are attending schools based on their family’s level of affluence as level of affluence is a large determinant of the neighborhood in which a family lives (Owens, 2018). Public schools are financed similarly throughout the United States: many states finance 48% of their public schools’ budgets, 44% comes from property taxes, and the remaining 8% of the budgets from grants (Ave & Honegger, 2010). Considering that 44% of public schools’

budgets are from property tax, schools in high-income neighborhoods receive more funding than schools located in low-income communities (Owens, 2018; Park, 2011).

Consequently, the resources that public schools have available to them vary and schools in low-income neighborhoods are challenged to stretch their limited resources to meet school accountability metrics (Ravitch, 2016). A resource that is often limited for public schools is designated funding specifically for college advising (Clayton, 2019). According to a survey conducted by NACAC (2015), 30% of public schools have a designated professional to provide college advising to students. While public schools may wish to provide more college access to support underserved students, they often do not have the resources to do so (Clayton, 2019). Public school districts are governed by the state and follow curriculum and operating structures set by the state which is different for public charter schools (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

Charter Schools

Charter schools are a form of public schools (Toma & Zimmer, 2012) and serve close to 6% of all students enrolled in public schools in the United States (Finn et al., 2017). Slightly over 3,000,000 students attend 7,500 charter schools nationwide (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, n.d.). Charter schools receive state funding and tend to be ran by nonprofit organizations while public independent school districts also receive state funding but are led by the local government (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Unlike independent school district schools where students automatically attend based on the school their neighborhoods are zoned to (Dorsey & Plucker, 2016), to gain admission to a charter school, students typically complete an application process and are entered into a lottery for selection (Ravitch, 2016). The purpose of charter schools is to “increase

the choice of learning opportunities within the public school system...establish a new form of accountability for public schools...and encourage different and innovative learning methods” (Texas Education Code, 2018, para. 1).

There are certain metrics that charter schools must meet similarly to independent school districts such as state graduation requirements, but charter schools have more autonomy and flexibility with staffing and how they facilitate education (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Texas Education Code, 2018). According to Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008),

The charter school framework serves as a potential solution to inequality in college counseling for underserved students of color. Currently, charter school communities are redesigning school organizational structures and student-staff ratios to improve college access for students of color (p. 81).

Charter schools’ service to students from diverse racial and economic backgrounds reflect a relatively similar percentage as what public independent school districts serve (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2012). However, most public charter schools are founded with the intention to provide an education for economically and racially underserved students (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2012).

Unlike public charter schools, private schools serve a significantly smaller proportion of students from racially and economically diverse backgrounds (Reardon et al., 2006).

Private Schools

Eleven percent of families in the United States have their students enrolled in private schools without receiving government assistance for tuition and fees (Egalite & Wolf, 2016). A private school is a “tuition-based school” (Freeman, 2015, p. 6) that is

funded by private sources. Private schools are “dependent on user fees to cover all or part of their operational and development costs...[and] are managed largely independently of the state and are owned and/or founded independently of the state” (Ashley et. al, 2014, p. 4). Private schools “are not governed by a public bureaucracy and have less requirements regarding curriculum and performance measures than public schools” (Holmes Erickson, 2017, p. 492). Most private schools have a religious affiliation, but some are secular (Taie et al., 2019).

Secular private schools have more racially diverse students enrolled than religious private schools (Reardon et al., 2006) however, there are some religious, private schools that specifically serve underserved students (Higareda, 2010). The segregation of Black and Latino students from White students is greater at schools that are private, especially religious, compared to those that are public; as significantly more White students attend private school than Black and Latino students (Reardon et al., 2006). Private schools also have a significantly higher enrollment rate of students from families with middle and high incomes than families with low incomes (Reardon et al., 2006). These families pay directly for their students’ education and expect high quality service. Private schools provide tailored services to their students such as college advising. NACAC (2015) reported that 73% of private schools have at least one professional who is dedicated specifically for providing college advising to students.

Criteria for Participation and Recruitment

Purposeful sampling (Gall et al., 2010) and criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) were utilized. Purposeful sampling is an appropriate strategy for determining which participants to include in a case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008) and “involves a search for

instances of a phenomenon that are information rich” (Gall et al., 2010, p. 336), and through their study answer the research questions posed (Patton, 2002). Criterion sampling was also used to identify potential college advisors for this study given its methodological design that includes gaining an in-depth understanding of college advisors’ PD as they serve underserved students in high school settings.

The criteria to participate in this study included: 1) serving in either a traditional public, charter, or private high school context as a college advising professional whose paramount responsibility is college advising; 2) serving as a college advising professional at a school with at least a 50% population of underserved students; 3) having at least two years of experience working as a college advisor. This criteria protocol helped ensure the comparability of the data collection procedures across the cases (Yin, 2003). College advisors who participated in this study signed a consent form (see Appendix A) indicating their voluntary participation, and they along with their schools were assigned pseudonyms. In total, six college advisors, two from traditional public schools, two from charter schools, and two from private schools were recruited to participate in this study.

After IRB approval was received from Texas State University to conduct this study, participants were recruited utilizing the NACAC (2021) Member Institution and Organization Directory to search for high schools that are public, charter, and private located in urban areas in Texas. This directory provided contact information for the college advisors. I emailed 30 college advisors (see Appendix B) to ask if they met the criteria to serve as a participant in this study and gaged their interest in participating. I gained six participants from those recruited. Once the participants were confirmed, multiple data collection methods were utilized to gather data from the participants.

Data Collection

Multiple sources of data were collected to inform the study's research questions (Creswell, 2013) as "each data source...[was] one piece of the 'puzzle,' with each piece contributing to the researcher's understanding of the whole phenomenon" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 554). The strategy of utilizing multiple data collection methods ensured a stronger understanding of the cases thus aiding in becoming more informed (Yin, 2014) of the roles and training and support experiences contributing to the PD of college advisors. According to Goodrick (2014), "given the focus on generating a good understanding of the cases and case context, methods such as...interviews and document analysis often dominate among the various data collection methods employed" (p. 1) for conducting comparative case studies. Interviews, a focus group, documents, a questionnaire, and a field notes journal were the sources of data for this study (see Figure 3).

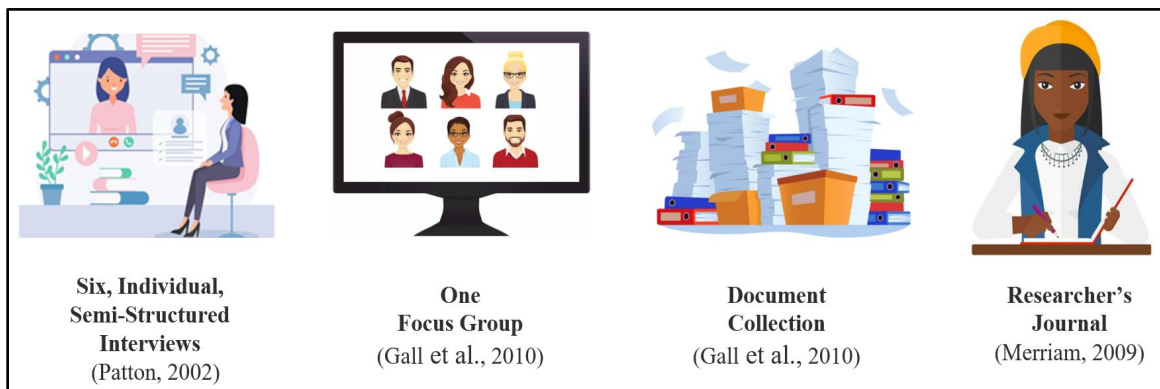


Figure 3 *Data Collection*

Individual Interviews

Interviewing was a strong qualitative data collection technique because it allowed for learning the perspectives, motives, and feelings from the participants themselves as to making assumptions based from things that “cannot [be] directly observed” (Patton, 2002, p. 340). Interviewing allowed for the gathering of first-hand narratives from the participants. The interviews aided in explaining phenomena that occurred that numerical data often cannot explain (Patton, 2002). A one-hour, semi-structured, individual interview was conducted via a virtual platform with each of the six participants. The virtual platform’s recording feature was utilized during individual interviews to ensure accurate transcription and analysis of the data. The purpose of the interviews was to learn about the participants’ roles in their positions as well as about their training and support experiences. The interviews were guided by an interview protocol (see Appendix C). In addition to the interviews, a focus group was conducted.

Focus Group

Focus groups have been described as

A form of group interview in which a number of people participate in a discussion guided by a skilled interviewer. Because the respondents can talk to and hear each other, they are likely to express feelings or opinions that might not emerge if they were interviewed individually (Gall et al., 2010, p. 349).

One virtual, two-hour focus group held over a virtual platform was facilitated with five out of the six participants. A focus group protocol was utilized to guide the conversation (see Appendix D). As with the individual interviews, the virtual platform’s recording feature was utilized to ensure accurate transcription and analysis of the data collected.

The focus group provided a space for the participants to discuss their roles and experiences with training and support for college advising within their schools as well as discuss the ecological factors influencing their PD. Through the conversation a better understanding of the perspectives and experiences of college advisors serving in high school contexts was revealed which aided in examining the roles and training and support college advisors received that contributed to their PD.

Document Collection

Document collection was utilized because it aided with the “study [of] written communications...found in field settings” (Gall et al., 2010, p. 349). As such, participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire (see Appendix E) in which demographics, previous work experience, and previous PD opportunities provided and attended were gathered. Participants were also asked to gather and e-mail copies of documents to me that were relevant to their roles and experiences as college advisors, including but not limited to their resumes, any job-related certifications, their current job descriptions, any training manuals utilized, and the programs from any conferences, trainings, and workshops attended within the last two years. These documents were collected to aid with gaining a clearer understanding of the roles and training and support received by the college advisors. Lastly, a field notes journal was kept recording observations and reflections as data were collected; the journal was an additional source of data.

Data Analysis

This study utilized the category construction data analysis technique (Merriam, 2009) to identify themes in the data gathered from the questionnaire, individual interviews, focus group, document collection, and field notes taken. The study’s

theoretical framework was applied during the data analysis process to aid with making sense of the data. Merriam's (2009) seven steps were followed during the data analysis process: read the first interview transcript, annotated the transcript, assigned codes to pieces of data, created a running list of codes, repeated steps one through four for each interview, focus group, notes taken, and documents collected, eliminated redundant codes, reduced codes, and grouped codes into categories. In Vivo coding and focus coding (Saldaña, 2009) were employed. In Vivo coding was an appropriate coding technique as this study "prioritize[d] and honor[ed] the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 74). In Vivo coding aided with "keep[ing] track of codes that...[were] participant-inspired rather than researcher-generated" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 75). The initial round of coding consisted of In Vivo coding as it allowed for the exact quotes of participants to be used as codes which aided with the study capturing the first-hand experiences and insights of college advisors. A priori codes were also generated from the theoretical framework which assisted with the construction of additional codes utilized in the data analysis process. Focus coding was used as a second cycle coding method that aided with "the development of major categories or themes from the data" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 155). Focus coding supported reducing the 729 individual codes that were cumulatively assigned 1,766 times to the data from the background questionnaires, individual interviews transcripts, job descriptions, resumes, focus group transcript, and field notes journal. Redundant codes were removed and reduced which resulted in the running list of 729 codes shrinking to 312 codes. The 312 codes were then grouped into categories. Fourteen categories emerged from the 312 codes, and the categories were consolidated to six themes. The MAXQDA computer program (MAXQDA, 2019) served

as a resource for organizing and coding the transcriptions and document materials. The following section provides insight into my positionality to this study.

Positionality

Researchers “position themselves” in a qualitative study by revealing their background along with connecting “how it informs their interpretation of the information in a study, and what they have to gain from the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 47). My experiences accessing higher education as a student from a low-income background along with serving as a college advising professional influenced my research agenda. In high school I was not able to receive guidance from my family on the college access process thus causing me to rely on a college advisor for help. My negative experience with my high school counselor not supporting me in enrolling in dual credit, community college courses, and my positive experience of having a College Forward college advisor, informed my ability and decision to attend Southwestern University; these experiences impacted how I perceive college advising. I view college advising as a powerful, strategic tool in influencing underserved students’ futures. I entered the college advising field with passion but limited training and support. I taught myself how to be a college advisor while on the job and continuously sought opportunities to stay updated on policies impacting college admission. My experience as a college advisor fueled my curiosity about the experiences of other college advisors in their roles, and with training and support when entering the role, as well as continuing in the profession. I have served as a college advisor in three different public high schools but do not have experience working in a charter or private setting. I wanted to learn about the roles and PD experiences of college advisors providing college access to underserved students in high school contexts.

The next section describes how the study worked to establish trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the study is an important aspect in the assurance of the findings and can be achieved by fitting the following criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Several techniques were utilized to strengthen the trustworthiness of the data collected from the college advisors. To achieve credibility, the confirmation of the researcher having portrayed the voices of the participants accurately, I facilitated member checks (Shenton, 2004). Peer debriefing (Schreiber et al., 2020) strengthened the study's credibility also as it allowed for a college advising professional not engaged with this study to provide feedback essentially identifying anything that I may have missed in the data. The strategy of triangulation was employed through the collection of multiple sources of data (e.g., individual interviews, focus group interview, questionnaire, college advisors' documents, and field notes journal) (Drouin et al., 2015). Triangulation assisted with validating the data by cross-checking several data sources which aided with assessing the consistency of the study's findings (Yin, 2014). In addition to having taken field notes two audio recorders were utilized (the virtual platform's recording feature and an additional audio-recorder) to ensure the quality of sound of the interviews as well as prevention of technological difficulties. The same transcription service was used to transcribe the interviews verbatim. To strengthen the transferability of the study, the ability for another researcher to conduct similar research utilizing the steps taken in this study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), a detailed explanation of the research study design has been given. Lastly, in order to achieve dependability and confirmability, ensuring that my analysis of the findings are

congruent and reflect the data collected (Patton, 2015), I constantly referred to the interview transcriptions and field notes to confirm alignment accuracy of the participants' perceptions and how they were depicted. I also utilized In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2009) which required the usage of direct quotes from the participants' interviews and the documents that they submitted to be used as codes for data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account to ensure that there was little risk to participate in the study. To protect the anonymity of participants pseudonyms were assigned and utilized in place of participants' real names. A breakdown of what participation in the study entailed was discussed with the participants prior to the start of data collection and documented on the consent form, of which they received a copy (see Appendix A). This breakdown covered the time commitment for participants, potential benefits and risks to participating, the ways in which data were collected, and participants' rights to withdraw from the voluntary study at any point.

I also ensured that all participant information and data were protected and not shared. All hard copies of data were kept in a securely locked cabinet at my home, and all electronic files were stored on a password-protected computer with the additional security measure of the computer having the push notification to a cell phone feature. As a researcher it was my responsibility to work to not cause harm to the participants. I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative for Social and Behavioral Researcher Students Course, under the requirements set by Texas State University, on September 25, 2020. The purpose of this training was to become educated on protecting human subjects while conducting ethical studies.

All data collection was facilitated virtually out of precaution of the COVID-19 coronavirus to limit participants' risk of exposure. No physical contact was made with or between participants. A virtual platform was utilized to conduct the individual interviews as well as the focus group. I hosted these meetings virtually in a private and secure office where only I was present which helped in protecting the privacy of participants. The virtual meetings were encrypted as well as had password requirements and waiting rooms where participants had to be let into the meetings by me. The following section concludes this chapter on the study's methodology.

Conclusion of Methods

A multiple case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008) with comparative elements (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) was conducted to learn about the training and support contributing to the PD experiences of college advisors as well as their roles serving within high schools. Through the data collection methods of a questionnaire, individual interviews, a focus group, document collection, and a field notes journal, data were analyzed to gain a clearer understanding of how college advisors serving underserved students in high school contexts describe their roles and PD experiences.

IV. FINDINGS

This chapter provides profiles of the six college advisors who participated and served as a case in this multiple case study. The profiles include a brief overview of the schools they serve in as well as the college advisors' demographic, education, and work background information. These descriptions incorporate some of the college advisors' narratives. Following the participant profiles is a detailed description of the six overarching themes revealed in the data from the study: *informal training, self-teaching, and learning with the students; all things college related; relationship building & collaboration; advocacy: going above and beyond to assist; barriers college advisors face; and college advisors' need for PD for advising specific student populations.*

Participant Profiles

Six college advisors whose primary roles consisted of college advising served as participants in this study: *Bre, Miguel Angel, DB, Jay, Mary, and Rhonda*. They all had at least two years of college advising experience, and served at a public, charter, or private high school with a population of at least 50% of underserved students (see Figure 4).

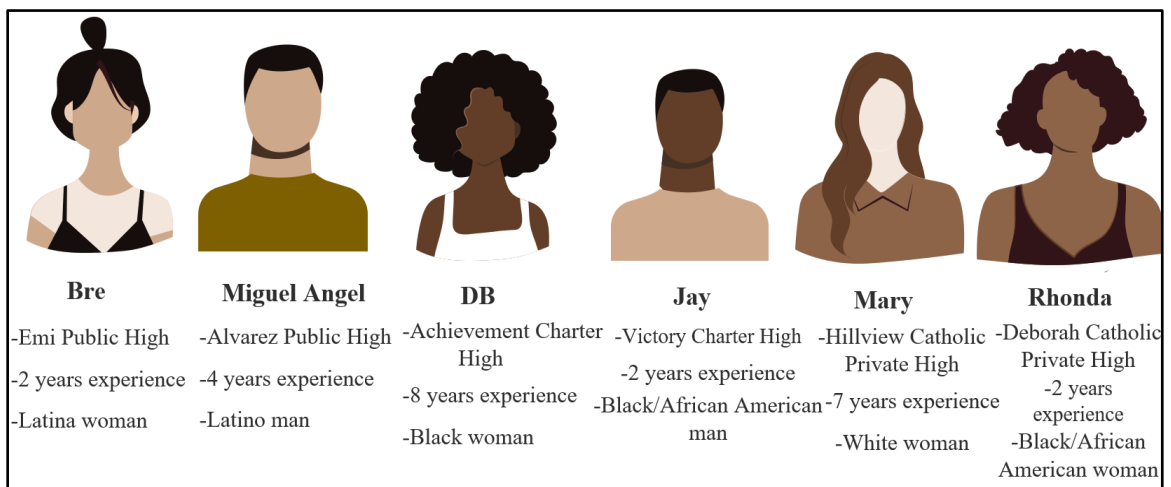


Figure 4 *Participant Demographics*

The participants' questionnaires (see Appendix E) and resume documents were analyzed, and the data informed the study of each participants' demographics: gender, race, ethnicity, income of parents when participants were in high school, education, employment history, and their number of years of college advising experience. The participants' job description documents revealed their official job titles at their schools as well as the minimum requirements set for the positions which are discussed more in Chapter V.

Bre

Emi Public High is a public high school serving 2,527 students. The school is in a small town with a population of slightly less than 30,000 people 20 minutes away from a large city in Texas. The senior class consists of 510 students. The school's college counseling team consists of one *High School College and Career Counselor*, Bre, employed by the school and assistance from one advisor from each CBO: College Forward and Upward Bound. Bre identifies as Latina. She is 38 years old and is the first in her family to graduate from college. Bre was raised by a single mother and grew up in a household with an income ranging from \$15,000 to \$24,999. Guiding herself through higher education Bre earned a Bachelor of Science in Communication Studies, a Master of Education in School Counseling and Guidance, and is currently pursuing a Doctorate of Philosophy in the field of Education. She has a Bilingual Generalist Teaching Certification for serving students in fourth through eighth grades as well as a School Counselor Certification for working with students from early childhood through the completion of high school. Prior to her role as High School College and Career Counselor Bre served as a teacher for four years then as a school counselor for eight

years. When asked what encouraged her to become a college counselor she stated, “I no longer wanted to be a counselor dealing with trauma”. Bre’s current position focuses on college and career planning as to social, emotional, and academic counseling. Bre is a member of the Texas Association of College Admission Counseling (TACAC).

Miguel Angel

Alvarez Public High is a public high school serving 1,249 students. The school is in a large city in Texas with a population of slightly over 1,000,000 people. The senior class consists of 290 students. The school’s college counseling team consists of one *Project Advance Facilitator*, Miguel Angel, employed by the school and assistance from one advisor from each CBO: Advise Texas, College Forward, Educational Talent Search, and Upward Bound. Miguel Angel identifies as Latino. He is 29 years old and is the first in his family to graduate from college. Miguel Angel was raised by a single mother and grew up in a household with an income ranging from \$15,000 to \$24,999. Miguel Angel earned a Bachelor of Art in History and Master of Education in Higher Education Leadership. He has a Teaching Certification for teaching history to students in eighth through twelfth grades. Prior to his college advisor position he served as a history and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) elective teacher. The AVID course prepares students for higher education, the workforce, and life. When asked what encouraged him to become a college advisor he stated,

While pursuing my undergraduate degree I became interested in working in higher education. My first teaching job was with the AVID program in the school district. I decided this would be a good fit until I earned my higher education degree to transition to working at a college or university campus. It brings me

great joy to serve students who are similar to me when I was in high school and working with the same student demographics.

Miguel Angel is also a member of TACAC.

DB

Achievement Charter High is a charter high school serving 565 students. The school is in a large city in Texas with a population of almost 2,500,000 people. The senior class consists of 131 students. The school's college counseling team consists of one *Director of College Counseling*, DB, two college counselors, and one college retention specialist all employed by the school as well as assistance from a part-time Advise Texas advisor. DB identifies as a Black woman. She was raised in a household with an income ranging from \$35,000 to \$49,999. Her father earned a doctorate degree. She is 39 years old. DB achieved a Bachelor of Arts in African American Studies, a Master of Education in Adult Education, and a Doctorate of Education in Ethical Leadership. Prior to her role as Director of College Counseling DB served as a college counselor for five years at an all-girls, private, affluent, Catholic high school, and before that worked in college admissions for five years. When asked what encouraged her to enter the college counseling field, she stated "the lack of access at my high school". DB is a member of the Admissions Community Cultivating Equity & Peace Today (ACCEPT), Great Plains Association for College Admission Counseling (GPACAC), NACAC, TACAC, and the Texas Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (TACRAO).

Jay

Victory Charter High is a charter high school serving 488 students. The school is in a large city in Texas with a population of almost 2,500,000 people. The senior class consists of 150 students. The school's college counseling team consists of one director of college counseling and two college counselors who are all employed by the school. Jay is a *College Counselor*. He identifies as a Black/African American man and is 28 years old. He was raised in a household with an income ranging from \$15,000 to \$24,999 and is the first in his family to earn a college degree. Jay achieved a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies and a Master of Arts in Higher Education Administration. Prior to his College Counselor role Jay served as a college admission representative for two years. When asked what motivated him to enter the college counseling field, he stated "my experience working in higher education as a resident assistant, studying abroad, and my role as program coordinator for a job readiness program where I connected students with internships and helped them with the college admission process". Jay is a member of the Houston Area Recruiters Network and TACAC.

Mary

Hillview Catholic Private High is a private high school serving 412 students. The school is in a large city in Texas with a population of slightly over 1,000,000 people. The senior class consists of 98 students. The school's college counseling team consists of one *College Advisor*, Mary, who is employed by the school. Mary identifies as a White woman and is 51 years old. Her father earned a bachelor's degree. She was raised in a household with an income of \$200,000 and over. Mary earned a Bachelor of Business Administration. Mary served as a college and scholarship specialist at a large, public high

school for two years prior to her role as College Advisor. When asked what motivated her to enter the college counseling field, she stated “I worked in education in several different areas and loved working in high schools: parent support specialist, job coach, and college and scholarship specialist”. Mary is a member of TACAC and NACAC.

Rhonda

Deborah Catholic Private High is a private high school serving 515 students. The school is in a large city in Texas with a population of almost 1,500,000 people. The senior class consists of 130 students. The school’s college counseling team is made up of one director of college counseling and two college counselors all employed by the school. Rhonda is a *College Guidance Counselor and Registrar*. Rhonda identifies as a Black/African American woman and is 31 years old. She was raised in a household with an income ranging from \$100,000 to \$149,999. Her father’s highest level of education attainment is a master’s degree and mother’s is a bachelor’s degree. Rhonda earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in Management Information Systems and a Master of Science in Human Relations and Business. She also achieved a College Counseling Certificate. Prior to her role as College Guidance Counselor and Registrar, Rhonda served in the development department at Deborah Catholic High assisting with fundraising. Rhonda stated,

My own high school experience [was the motivation for becoming a college counselor]. The lack of support I received from my high school counselor inspired me to be supportive and encouraging to my students. My counselor didn’t believe in me and I refuse to do that to my students.

Rhonda is not a member of any professional associations.

Thematic Findings

The following section provides an overview of the six themes that emerged from the study's data (see Figure 5). The themes are presented in the order that they relate to the study's research questions: first shedding light on college advisors' insights about their college advising onboarding and ongoing PD experiences, then describing the college advisors' roles within their school contexts, and lastly, presenting the barriers encountered by college advisors in their PD and work with underserved students.



Figure 5 *Thematic Findings*

Informal Training, Self-Teaching, and Learning with the Students

Highlighted in the data were three different ways how the college advisors learned as they were onboarding in their roles. Informal training refers to the process of college advisors receiving education and guidance on college advising through colleagues and

mentors sharing their experiences, wisdom, and best practices with them. Informal training tends to not be scheduled and is rather something that occurs while on the job and questions arise, such as when college advisors reached out to others in their field who they could receive assistance from. Formal training refers to scheduled, organized education and guidance on specific college advising topics offered by organizations such as the school, district, network, colleges, and professional organizations. Associated codes that contributed to the development of this theme included “informal training”, which was utilized 42 times, “learn from colleagues”, which was identified 16 times, “seeking to learn on their own”, used 24 times, and “learn as you are in the position” used 14 times in data analysis.

Overall, this theme revealed how the college advisors sought to learn more and educate themselves about college advising on their own during their first years in their positions; as there were not readily available, timely formal trainings on all the different aspects of college advising that came up when working with students. In the same vein, much of this learning occurred with students as college advisors fielded questions for which they did not know the answers. All six of the college advisors discussed experiencing informal training, teaching themselves different aspects of college advising and their roles while in the position, and learning with the students.

When asked about his journey training to become a college advisor Miguel Angel attributed the initial, basic college access knowledge he learned from his predecessor,

I was the full-time AVID elective teacher for grades nine through twelfth at that time at my campus. The college and career advisor at my school really held her perspective of the importance of including the AVID elective teacher and really

sort of taking me the teacher under her wing and training me in college advising and college access. From what I interpreted from that college and career advisor's perspective was the importance of really building a community of college advisors on the campus. This way she could ensure that the students who were assigned to me and my AVID program would be served competently and well with the correct information on applying to college. She made herself available to me for questions or any gaps in my knowledge along the way. (Miguel Angel)

Mary recalled her first year serving as an assistant to the lead school counselor in a college advisor capacity similar to an apprenticeship,

She put me in charge of everything to do with college and scholarships and taught me everything she knew. It was almost like an apprenticeship. It was awesome. So, I was under her and she was sending me to all the college counselor updates and things that she would normally do. (Mary)

The college advisors in the study credited their colleagues and peers as sources of their informal college advisor training. Miguel Angel stated,

I think I relied a lot on colleagues that I have met in the field to assist me especially when I first started formally. I relied on a lot of individuals. I try now that I'm experienced to play a role with new individuals who enter my district as well as college advisors. (Miguel Angel)

Similarly, Mary reiterated "peers have been a huge part of my learning and helping me move forward".

Self-teaching stood out in the data as many of the college advisors told their stories of their first years serving in their roles. When reflecting on her first year Rhonda

recalled teaching herself how to create and facilitate college guidance lesson plans in the classroom. In doing so, she learned more about different aspects of college admission that she did not know,

That's why I also appreciated that we taught those college guidance classes because when I was teaching them myself, I was like, 'oh, I didn't know this.' I've already been to college and I didn't know this, so teaching the classes has taught me a lot too. (Rhonda)

Jay expressed the complications he had during his first year with understanding how to assist students with completing the College Board College Scholarship Service Profile (CSS profile) which is an additional financial aid form that is required by some colleges for students to complete with their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to provide a deeper look at the family's financial income and assets,

But it was that CSS profile that I was just like, you know—challenging, so I kind of yielded that to another college counselor. This year I am stepping my game up, teaching myself more, you know, doing my own professional development and training for the CSS profile. (Jay)

Jay had not heard of the CSS profile prior to his first year as a college counselor. His first encounter with guiding a student through completing the CSS profile was challenging. Jay was not aware of any training and PD opportunities readily available for supporting students with submitting the CSS profile. During Jay's next year as a college counselor, he made it a point to teach himself how to complete the profile by utilizing the tutorial videos on the College Board website.

The study's data also revealed that college advisors learn with students. The college advisors' willingness to grow with students and learn with them along their journeys of accessing college was uniquely exposed by the data. When discussing her work with students DB spoke on her approach of "let's learn together". DB stated,

I would say humility with my kids has gone a long way and it has really added to the trust I work to build with them because they know that I know that I don't know everything, but I'm willing to go that extra mile. (DB)

Similarly to DB, Bre mentioned,

One of the things that works for me with the kids is just being honest and vulnerable with kids especially now that we're on virtual platforms. I feel like I've taken it to another level. We'll be talking and I'll share my screen and say 'let's look it up together' and we're looking and I'm showing and I'm like navigating through the websites. (Bre)

Miguel Angel discussed the importance of leading by example for students through showing them that he does not have all the college advising answers, but he does have the will to find them,

Having sort of an investigator's heart, coming at it from an investigator's lens, and sharing that perspective with your students, you know, like a brief mention and screen share with them. 'Oh, I don't know either, but I know how to look stuff up. So let me help you do the first one and then you do the next one' and kind of doing stuff like that. (Miguel Angel)

Mary talked about times during her first year not knowing how to navigate the application process for the QuestBridge College Match Scholarship, a "program [that]

pairs academically outstanding low-income students with admission and full-scholarships to partner colleges. College Match Scholarships cover tuition, room, and board for all four years of college” (QuestBridge College Match, 2007).

Mary reflected on how she found humor while learning with students,

I even joke with my quest bridge applicant kids. I was like, well, you guys are my guinea pigs. Let's hope for the best. And, you know, we'll learn together and sometimes that's what we have to do because there isn't really a ton of training.

(Mary)

In conclusion, Rhonda’s statement that “a lot of it is just learning as you go”, overall, was revealed as a common trend amongst the college advisors in this study as they described experiencing informal training, self-teaching, and learning with the students as a part of their onboarding training experiences during their first years serving in their roles.

All Things College Related

The theme of *all things college related* had a strong presence within the data and related to the roles the college advisors have within their high schools. The college advisors in the study provided a breakdown of their main duties at their schools that can best be summarized as consisting of all things college related. Mary stated “I do 100% everything college”. Miguel Angel mentioned that “sometimes I feel if anything has a hint of college it's automatically tied to the college advisor”. The data revealed that all things college related included the following duties which were also utilized as codes that contributed to the development of the theme: “educating students, families, and teachers on college and financial aid processes” was used 21 times; “teaching college seminar courses” was used 12 times; “providing direct college advising and guidance to students”

was used 20 times; “prioritizing working with juniors and seniors” was used 10 times; “building the school’s college-going culture” was used 8 times; “hosting college visits, fairs, and trips” was used 13 times; “tracking and maintain student data” was used 30 times; and “helping facilitate college entrance standardized testing” was used 11 times.

Educate Students, Families, and Teachers on College and Financial Aid Processes

The college advisors in the study all discussed how they educate students, families, and teachers on the college admission and financial aid processes. DB spoke about how she works to educate students on the details of college admission including clarifying how colleges have unique processes for being admitted to specialized majors,

You know, students thought they could apply straight to med school or students didn't understand, especially students who are interested in nursing at Prairie View A&M University. They didn't understand that you can be admitted to Prairie View A&M University and not be admitted to the nursing program down the road if you don't take care of what you need to take care of. So just educating them on small things like that to give them what they need to plan ahead. (DB)

The college advisors in the study all work predominantly with students from underserved backgrounds on accessing college. Considering that most of the students will be the first in their families to attend college, DB’s quote shows how the college advisors work to thoroughly explain to students how to apply for admission and what to expect further down the road once they are enrolled.

All the college advisors in the study also talked about their duty of hosting family financial aid programming and outreach to educate and assist families with supporting their students with pursuing college. All college advisors stated that they host financial

aid programming for families in October because that is when the FAFSA opens. College financial aid is distributed on a first-come-first-served basis. DB discussed how at her school they offer an abundance of support to ensure that families are educated on the financial aid application process and receive guidance on successfully applying,

So, we really try to drive that point home early. When the FAFSA opened in October, we were on it you know, providing webinars, providing Spanish support, providing staff support to make sure families had everything they needed to successfully complete the application. (DB)

Supporting students with accessing college is a team effort. The college advisors in the study work to include families in the process. They assist families with completing the items their students need from them to move forward with the college admission process. In addition to educating students and their families, the college advisors also educate teachers on the college and financial aid processes with the intent on teachers being able to provide accurately informed college access assistance to students. Miguel Angel provided the example of how he educates his school's English teachers on the important piece of the college admission application: the college essay. Miguel Angel stated,

I found myself going into professional learning community meetings with teachers to discuss what a college essay looks like. What the topics are. Some of these things so that they not only are aware, but also, we set the expectations of what college essays should look like. (Miguel Angel)

By college advisors educating English teachers on the college essay requirements the English teachers can provide extra support to students and assist with the writing process.

Teach College Seminar Courses

At Achievement Charter High, Victory Charter High, and Deborah Catholic High, college counselors have the duty to serve as classroom teachers and teach college seminar classes. DB discussed the breakdown of classes the college counselors at Achievement Charter High teach,

My senior college counselor teaches five sections of college seminar classes and she is responsible for college counseling 131 students. My junior college counselor teaches six sections of our seminar class and he is responsible for 140 students. I've been working to get Achievement Charter High to embrace the more traditional college counseling model where you pull the college counselor out of the classroom, so they have the time to work individually with students.

In discussion about the college advisors having teaching responsibilities at DB, Jay, and Rhonda's schools, the college advisors stated that none of them had an education background in teaching yet, they are expected to teach college seminar courses. Jay talked about his experience during his first year in his college counselor role,

I was new to Victory Charter High and just new to being an educator in a school every single day. So teaching the junior seminar class everyday was an adjustment. It is an elective so I'm not a certified teacher which of course in Texas you don't have to be for an elective. (Jay)

Rhonda spoke about how she did not know how to teach while in her first year in the college counselor role,

I would talk to the other teachers to get some of their teaching strategies. My college counselor director was very helpful and then I just tried to find tips online.

I didn't have any formal training. That would have been nice actually because I had never taught before in my life. I mean I taught piano classes. I think that's a little different and even substituting is different. I feel like you know, they tell you what to do but with teaching freshmen seminar you have to create your own lesson plans and everything. Then with classroom management it's just a whole new level. So that's something I struggled with. It would have been nice to have some kind of professional development formally. (Rhonda)

Three out of the six college advisors in this study discussed their schools' requirement of college counselors also serving as classroom teachers. Each mentioned receiving little to no training on how to teach, facilitate, and manage the courses.

Provide Direct College Advising and Guidance to Students

All the college advisors in the study stated that their main role at their schools is to provide direct college advising and guidance to students. Rhonda explained that "there's a lot of checking-in with students" in her college counselor role. DB expressed, "I have a caseload of students who I work with directly and help them with their college application process". Bre stated that "fifty percent of my time is actually spent college advising". Mary also talked about an aspect of her direct work with students, "I offer all of them help with essays. I help with short answer responses. I do all of that. But the problem with that is it eats up a ton of time". The college advisors discussed how they meet one-on-one with students and support them through completing the college admission process: assist with the crafting of lists of colleges to apply to, help students with college and financial aid applications, essay writing assistance, review transcripts with students so they understand how to read them and know their grade point averages,

assist with applying for scholarships, host daily office hours, support students with meeting deadlines, help with communicating with college representatives, and explain financial aid package offers and college costs to attend. The direct advising and guidance the college advisors provide requires time, and “you have to have a love for helping people and serving” stated Jay.

The college advisors in the study were specific in stating that they prioritize working with junior and senior students. When asked about his caseload of students Miguel Angel stated, “a lot of college advisors think only about their senior cohort, but I also think about my juniors too because I spend like half of the year where I’m balancing both my juniors and seniors”. When discussing the percentage breakdown of his roles Jay said, “40% of my role is advising juniors and seniors”. Mary mentioned, “granted, you know, I’m mostly working with juniors and seniors, but I do visit my freshmen and sophomores to give the message, ‘hey everybody here can go to college’, you know, that’s the most important message. Mary revealed how she tries to briefly meet with the freshmen and sophomores collectively. When her principal asked her to spend more time working with the freshmen and sophomore students Mary stated, “I’m one person”. While college advisors try to work with underclassmen their time is stretched thin, and they prioritize working with junior and senior students as they are closer to going off to college.

Build School’s College-Going Culture

It was evident in the data that the college advisors work to build their high schools’ college-going culture. They build the culture in various ways such as through creating access to college resources such as college visits, fairs, and trips. Rhonda stated,

“I help with coordinating the college fairs and I schedule the college rep visits so I’m in charge of getting students to attend”. Jay said, “a lot of my role is assisting with juniors: advising, teaching, and helping with the junior college visits and trips”. Mary shared that at her school, they “normally have a lot of colleges visiting campus, about 90 schools a year on campus”. College representative visits and college fairs are an opportunity for students to learn about colleges, their admission processes, student life, financial aid, and students can ask representatives specific questions about the colleges (Schneider, 2007). With college representative visits, college advisors and college representatives work together to schedule the representatives visiting the high school to meet with a group of students interested in learning more about the higher education institution. The college advisors host the visit, assist with getting students to the visit, and provide the space for the college representative to present to the students. With college fairs, college advisors plan the date and logistics, invite numerous college representatives to attend, host all the representatives in the same space at the school allowing room for each to have their own booth, and facilitate the students attending the fair and going up to the booths to learn more about the colleges. At both college representative visits and college fairs the students are given college brochures that provide a preview of the college. They both essentially allow students to experience colleges without leaving their high school. College representative visits and college fairs are ways to expose students to colleges they may have never heard of. They also provide college representatives opportunities to get to know students so that they may advocate for students during the application review for admission process. Parents and families are typically not invited to attend school-day college representative visits but are invited to attend evening college fairs. The college

advisors in the study also discussed facilitating college field trips for students to tour the college and get a first-hand experience of what it is like being on the college's campus. Bre told a story about her belief in exposing all students to college campuses regardless of their academic status,

I didn't have requirements on who could go see colleges. I wanted all students to be able to go regardless of what was going on with them. I wanted everybody to experience and at least see a college. One of the senior teachers responded like 'well that student is not even passing my class. Why would you let him go to see a college?' And my response was, 'well, I'm never going to hold students back from going to see a college. I don't care where they are in class rank. I don't care what their GPAs are. I don't care what their grades currently are.' I said, you know, 'them going to see a college can be the thing that motivates them.' (Bre)

Bre's story demonstrates how she acknowledges that many underserved students have not experienced being on a college campus. Bre works to encourage students to set the goal of attending college by providing them with college exposure and showing students that it can be their reality. This is an example of how college advisors work to build schools' college-going culture. Even if they experience pushback from teachers, they work to build attending college as a norm at their schools. Bre showed this by taking her stance on welcoming all students to attend the college trips she facilitates.

Miguel Angel demonstrated building his school's college-going culture through his strategic approach of gaining his principal's support in enforcing the college essay prompts be given as assignments for grades in English classes. Miguel Angel stated,

I sit on my campus' leadership team. I've been able to go from my predecessor pretty much asking 'hey, can I come and do this [in the classes].' Not that they [teachers] would ever say no to that because of our principal, there would be no way he would be okay with that. But instead shifting to this is now a part of your [teachers'] scope and sequence. Right. So, as you're planning next year for English three, you know, part of it will be the college essay. English four you are going to be doing the college essay or you're going to be tweaking the essay that's part of your scope and sequence. So, it's not like an ask anymore. (Miguel Angel)

Miguel Angel's story demonstrates how he works to build his school's college-going culture by setting the expectation that every student writes a college essay because every student will apply to college and attend. At his school he can rely on the English department teachers to support students through the college admission essay writing process.

Track and Maintain Student Data

Another duty that the college advisors discussed that they oversee is tracking and maintaining student data for the senior class such as their ACT and SAT scores, the number of college applications submitted, the number of college acceptances, the amount of financial aid money offered, and other metrics relating to college readiness. Bre reflected on her school's expectation that she tracks and maintain student data yet, she was not given access to a software such as Naviance to help her with this task,

I wish we [the school district] could afford something that would give me more data because data speaks, but I have to develop my own tracking excel sheet.

Everything I have is in Google Drive and that's how I track the kids. I track where

they apply, college acceptances, scholarships received, whether they've done their FAFSA. I'm like harassing these kiddos at this point, you know. Did you do it?

Did you do it? Did you do it? Like that kind of thing. (Bre)

DB explained that at Achievement Charter High they track several metrics: the number of applications students submit, the quality of students' application lists, the percentage of students who have completed the FAFSA, and the percentage of students who applied early action and early decision to colleges. To apply early action to a college means that students have decided to fully apply for admission by an early deadline with the understanding that the college will inform them of their admission decision by an early date typically months before their April 1st notification deadline. To apply early decision to a college means that students have made their decisions early that if they are admitted to the college, they have bound themselves to a contract stating that they will enroll at that specific college and will withdraw any other applications they had with other colleges. DB shared her computer screen when talking about how she utilizes Naviance and Salesforce to track and maintain student data,

It gets more granular, like if I want to see who does not have a FAFSA submitted then I can click here, and this is the list of students who have not submitted their FAFSA. We then go directly to those students and provide additional support. As a matter of fact, I'm meeting with a few students later today. (DB)

Requiring all students to submit college and financial aid applications are efforts to increase college access and enrollment. Miguel Angel expressed his frustration with tracking and maintaining data as well,

My principal is very data driven and even more so because our school district sends out a weekly list of all our schools in the district and where we are regarding data numbers for college applications and financial aid applications submitted [essentially putting us in competition]. So, my principal does not want to be last on that list. (Miguel Angel)

DB stated “I have a love-hate relationship with the data. Data is used for accountability and encouragement, but it doesn’t capture the full portfolio of kids”. Numbers are not able to tell the full stories of students. For example, the data may show that a senior did not apply to a university thus appearing as the senior will not go to college after high school. However, the data did not capture that the senior is currently dually enrolled in high school and community college. While the senior has decided not to apply to a university, they are in fact already a college student and plan to continue taking courses at the community college after high school graduation.

Along with the duty of tracking and maintaining student data all the college advisors in the study except for Mary discussed their roles and responsibilities of helping facilitate college entrance standardized testing. Rhonda stated, “one of my specific roles is to manage our database because I am big on detail. I also coordinate the PSAT”.

Miguel Angel said,

I serve as a coordinator not only for [the] TSI (Texas Success Initiative) but the school day SAT. My good relationship with my school’s testing coordinator also means I am being pulled into some of those exams such as STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness), PSAT (Preliminary SAT), and

CLEP (College Level Examination Program) just because I guess I'm a natural organizer and I could help with some of the logistics of planning. (Miguel Angel)

The college advisors discussed helping facilitate college entrance exam testing. While it is a tedious and time-consuming process, through their facilitation of exams at their schools, they provide fee waivers and access for testing that often present barriers for underserved students in the form of transportation, time, money, and instruction.

Relationship Building and Collaboration

The theme of relationship building and collaboration strongly appeared in the data. The college advisors in the study talked about the importance of building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders: students, teachers, CBOs, college admission representatives, and colleagues. The college advisors also discussed how as an extension of these relationships come the opportunity for collaboration to support students accessing college. Associated codes that contributed to the development of this theme included: “ensuring students that you are with them 100% of the way” used 23 times; “collaborate with school staff” used 12 times; “collaborate with CBOs” used 8 times; “building relationships with college representatives” used 19 times; “supporting colleagues” used 18 times; and “college advisors sharing resources with other college advisors” used 35 times.

Miguel Angel’s quote best captures how the college advisors described one of their main priorities in their positions which is building relationships with students, “part of the role can be getting to know them first to see what they like, what they want to do, then tie in career plans after”. His quote demonstrates the college advisors’ approach to advising students with their postsecondary plans. They find value in getting to know the

students holistically prior to jumping straight into helping the students plan for their futures. Rhonda's quote highlights further how building relationships with students entails being a positive adult in students' lives who they can trust,

It's all about building that connection and that's what I had to learn. Like, I know I had a lot of [college related] stuff I needed them to do, but I still had to build trust, and I had to let them know that they could come to me and sometimes the stuff that I needed to talk to them about had to wait. (Rhonda)

In Rhonda's narrative she demonstrated how there are times that college advisors' agenda for meetings with students get placed on hold because the students may need support in other areas of their lives at that moment. Therefore, the college advisors may shift focus during the meeting time from a college-related agenda to what the students have on their minds. Students wanting to share other aspects of their lives with college advisors aside from talking about college shows the relationship that students have with the college advisors.

In addition to building relationships with students college advisors also build relationships with teachers. The purpose of these relationships is to collaboratively support students in accessing college. Miguel Angel spoke about him needing his school's teachers' assistance with encouraging students to seek his guidance in the Go Center,

I really want my teachers to understand that I feel that they play such a pivotal role because I feel that they can shape whether students want to come in to see me or not. So, especially with the physical look of my Go Center space it does look very 4-year college centered right away and that's not a bad thing. Many programs

like AVID you're building a college-going culture so it invites a certain type of student, but it might not be inviting to all. And so, I really want to get across to my teachers, okay, that's where I need you. (Miguel Angel)

Miguel Angel talked about his Go Center, college and career classroom space, being perceived by some students as intimidating, overwhelming, or not welcoming to those who may not yet know that they can attend college, or the students who are interested in pursuing technical programs or careers immediately after high school graduation. Miguel Angel sends passes for students to use elective-class time to meet with him, but some students dismiss the opportunity. Yet, teachers often have connections with some of these students, which college advisors do not. One reason is because students are required to attend their scheduled school-day classes but at Miguel Angel's school students are not required to visit the Go Center to meet with the college advisor. As such, the teachers have more of an opportunity to build relationships with students who attend required classes as they have daily interaction with them. College advisors collaborate with teachers by tapping into teachers' relationships with students; to have teachers promote and even escort students to visit the college advisor.

Mary discussed how she has strong relationships with the teachers at her school and how she collaborates with them to support students seeking college admission in areas she is not as familiar with,

I do have a coach who really helps with, you know, the athletic kids...I also have an amazing art teacher who helps our kids because I can do the college side, but I don't know all of those small details about the portfolios and all of that for the art kids. I'm learning through her. (Mary)

Mary's quote shows the collaborative efforts of the college advisor and teachers to support students with gaining college admission in specialized areas as well as pursuing athletics at the collegiate level.

Bre, DB, and Miguel Angel each spoke about having CBOs at their schools who they collaborate with to serve the college advising needs of students. Miguel Angel stated that at his school they are "fortunate to have GEAR UP, Upward Bound, Education Talent Search, College Forward, and Advise Texas" advisors who help him provide college access to the students. The college advisors in the study also all discussed how important their relationships with college admission representatives are and how they work collaboratively to support students. DB talked about how her relationships with college representatives aid her in getting the information she needs to advise students,

And then just continuing to establish relationships with colleges because most of the things I've learned in this work have come from just really being in direct communication with college reps. It's much better for me to be able to pick up the phone and call a rep at the University of Houston to get my questions answered versus going through the rigmarole. (DB)

In addition to relationships with college representatives being beneficial for college advisors they can also be symbiotic. Bre's example of how she collaborates with the college representative from Texas A&M University best demonstrates college advisors' symbiotic relationships with college representatives,

I've made some pretty good relationships with recruiters to where they'll send the list of what parts of the college application each of my students who applied there are missing. Since doing that, you know, I received this really nice coffee mug

from Texas A&M and some bundt cakes because I increased our applications by 30%. (Bre)

College representatives benefit from sharing application information, with the permission of students, because it allows college advisors to follow up with students regarding their applications. College advisors are then able to assist students with submitting the outstanding items to move their application statuses from incomplete to admission decisions pending. This symbiotic relationship helps increase the number of students who submit completed applications to the college which is an important metric in the college admission field as well as the metric of how many students enroll.

Lastly, the college advisors in the study agreed that building and maintaining relationships with their college advisor colleagues is highly beneficial. DB discussed how she attends conferences more so for the networking opportunities to meet other college advisors,

I engaged in the TACAC, NACAC, TACRO, super conferences, all of those things, and it wasn't at those conferences where I learned a whole bunch and felt like, 'oh, now I can go back and hit the ground running.' It was the relationships that I built with colleagues there and then afterwards. We could really bounce ideas off one another and we all serve a similar population. (DB)

DB revealed the value of building relationships with colleagues who serve similar student demographics and can be college advising resources to one another.

Advocacy: Going Above and Beyond to Assist

It was evident in the data that the college advisors from all three school contexts consistently advocate for their students and work to go above and beyond to assist them

with accessing college. In addition to their designated college advising duties, they also supported students in ways that they were not obligated to engage in but did so because of their compassion and dedication to the students. Associated codes that contributed to the development of this theme included “consciousness raising” used 17 times; “going above and beyond to assist” used 28 times; and “we want to do whatever we can to help” used 31 times.

DB discussed how she goes the extra mile to learn more about higher education institutions’ diversity and inclusion culture and climate on campuses,

I speak with their admissions folks and just talk to them about efforts on campus. How are their Black and Brown college students feeling in the wake of COVID-19, in the wake of civil unrest, in the wake of truth, and, you know, all of those things because, again, if the admissions department won't have those real conversations, then I don't feel comfortable sending my students because that tells me that the work isn't being done with ability on their campus. So, oftentimes, you know, my professional development when it comes to serving my student population is just advocating for them when it comes to talking with college reps.

(DB)

DB’s example shows her willingness to ask serious questions about higher education institutions’ commitment to providing a safe, inclusive, welcoming environment for the purpose of being able to shield her students from attending institutions that may cause them harm. DB promotes students attending institutions that will support them holistically in achieving success. She puts in the extra effort to provide students with

information that can help them make decisions to attend institutions that they more likely will receive the support they need to be retained and graduate.

Mary reflected on her practice of making herself available to students during school breaks when she is technically off from work,

My kids who I know that their parents are engaged, obviously, I'm still communicating with everybody equally, but I'm more aware of checking-in with my kids who I feel their parents aren't also checking-in just to make sure that they're not forgetting their deadlines. I'm also always willing to talk to those kids over the holidays where for everybody else I'm like if you need anything you better reach me before the holiday. I'm sympathetic with the [underserved] kids who I don't feel have the same guidance [as privileged students] because I'm trying to create an even playing field, which I know is impossible, but I'm trying to create as much of an even playing field as I can when it comes to me [the college advisor]. (Mary)

Mary's practice of working with students during school breaks shows her compassion to go above and beyond assisting students accessing college as she chooses to work hours outside of her work schedule to serve them.

Another example of working to go above and beyond helping students access college is Jay's willingness to learn about as well as offer support with the tax filing and amendment processes for families. When discussing how he works to eliminate college access barriers for students Jay said,

There are a lot of issues with families incorrectly filing taxes so that's something that I've noticed as well that I've really, really had to do a lot of support with

undoing some of those things, you know, figuring out how to ethically report this information right. Ultimately, the family makes the decision if they want to change their taxes. (Jay)

To complete the FAFSA eligible families must have tax information to utilize to fill out the application and in many cases are required to show documentation for verification prior to receiving financial aid. Jay providing tax reporting advising and assistance shows how he goes above and beyond to help families have the accurate information they need to complete financial aid applications. It is Jay's duty to help families fill out financial aid applications however, he is not expected to help with tax filing information. He chooses to provide this support to families as a method to eliminate the barrier of students not attending college due to the lack of ability to fund.

An additional example of the theme of advocacy: going above and beyond to assist was Miguel Angel's value and practice of working during the summer months to prevent recently graduated high school students from deciding against moving forward with attending the college they committed to. Miguel Angel stated,

I really focus my practice on summer melt. I really care about students actually enrolling in college. The data the school district focuses on are only college and financial aid applications. The data point that we need is how many students matriculate in the fall. (Miguel Angel)

The summer melt that Miguel Angel refers to are "the challenges faced by low-income racial/ethnic minority students during the summer before college" (Rall, 2016, p. 462). Summer melt is "the experience where students who planned to attend college were unable to navigate the additional summer obstacles thereby not actually attend their

intended college the fall after high school graduation” (Tacket et al., 2018, p. 40). To reiterate, Miguel Angel is held accountable for supporting students with completing college admission and financial aid applications; however, he is not held accountable for working to ensure that students make it to their respective college campuses for the fall semester. It is common for barriers to emerge during the summer after high school graduation which can negatively impact students’ college matriculation. Miguel Angel recognizes this phenomenon and goes above and beyond continuing to work over the summer to provide guidance to support students with college entrance exam testing, financial aid verification, housing registration, first-year orientation, and familial concerns which can all prevent students from attending college in the fall.

Barriers College Advisors Face

The college advisors in this study all discussed different barriers they experience in their college advising role at their respective schools. Barriers that were most encountered by the college advisors were lack of staff, lack of time, lack of funding, and elitism in college counselor fly-in opportunities. Associated codes that contributed to the development of the *barriers college advisors face* theme included: “barriers” used 42 times; “direct influences impacting students’ college access” used 21 times; “racism” used 7 times; “lack of staff” used 12 times; “lack of time” used 15 times; “lack of funding” used 18 times; and “college counselor fly-in” used 32 times.

In the individual interviews and focus group many of the college advisors spoke about lacking staff to assist with serving the college advising needs of students. Bre, Mary, and Miguel Angel are the only college counselors at their schools. Bre emphasized that “there are 510 seniors and one of me”. Having a limited number of school staff

assigned to college advising students can cause the one to few who are assigned to college advising to be stretched thin trying to meet a large amount of students' needs. DB discussed the barrier of inequitable staffing that she experiences within her charter school's network and how she works to raise this issue to their attention,

My advocacy is really for my team and their capacity. I know they're tired and overworked and I'm just making sure they [the network] know we need additional help. We need full-time help and not just the help that Advise Texas can provide on a part-time basis. It's confusing for our students when there is a counselor who pops in and out and is part-time, you know, so just talking about more of what our students deserve versus scraping by. With us having such a small team we can't do a lot of the individual work that we'd like to do with families. Another one of our charter schools in our network, in this city, has double the staff and it translates. Well during my time here I've shared with the regional folks and the foundation. Until the charter school network works to become a more equitable organization, we can't have the same goals if we don't have the same resources.

(DB)

DB highlighted the frustration she experiences with the metrics and targeted data goals that the charter school network sets as her school's college counseling team consists of five college counselors including herself while other charter schools in the network have more staff. The barrier of lack of staff to serve the students' college access needs was evident in the study's data.

The theme of college advisors lacking time was also prominent in the data. Most of the college advisors discussed experiencing lack of time regarding serving students

and really having to prioritize working only with upperclassmen and not underclassmen. The college advisors also discussed lacking time to engage in PD. Rhonda's quote summarizes this best,

I think when you just have so much work that you have to do it's hard to kind of find time and carve out time to either take off or find these opportunities to help you do your professional development. So, I didn't do as much professional development as I would have wanted to. (Rhonda)

Rhonda's quote reveals how college advisors' workload can often feel overwhelming to the extent that college advisors experience guilt for taking time off from work as well as utilizing work-time to engage in PD. Rhonda also stated "I will say I didn't go to as much PD as I should have but my budget wasn't big. Some of the things I wanted to go to I couldn't afford". Lack of funding is another challenge all studied college advisors strongly expressed. Miguel Angel spoke about the dilemma he encounters, "I think the biggest thing with PD is that a lot of them you need to pay for. So, I have to make a decision, you know, am I paying for that myself?". The lack of funding on the part of Miguel Angel's school to support his attendance at PD events puts him in a position of having to fund his PD with his personal money if he elects to engage.

Another barrier the studied college advisors face is elitism in college counselor fly-in opportunities. Colleges, especially highly selective colleges, tend to target elite high schools to recruit academically competitive students (Weis et al., 2014) resulting in the college counselors who work at elite high schools being invited to attend college fly-ins at these colleges. DB mentioned that prior to working at the charter school she worked at an elite, all-girls private school where most her students' families paid fully for

college without the assistance of financial aid. When working at this private school DB received numerous college counselor fly-in invitations compared to now working at the charter school. DB expressed that,

It's one of the really frustrating things about this profession is their emphasis placed on elitism. The schools that produce high achieving students get invited everywhere, to all the college counselor fly-ins...underserved financially and socially translates to underserved academically...so a lot of our [charter school] students test below grade level, for example, our average ACT score is a 17 because they haven't had access to solid academics for the entirety of their academic careers. (DB)

There are inequities in college access as well as in college advisor PD. In addition, the fact that the two public school college counselors in this study had very little knowledge about college counselor fly-ins and had not attended any also shows the inequities in college counselor fly-in invitation opportunities.

College Advisors' Need for PD for Advising Specific Student Populations

All the college advisors in the study highlighted how they serve students from specific populations and how these students have varying needs regarding college advising. The theme of *college advisors' need for PD for advising specific student populations* was revealed as the code "need for PD for advising specific groups" was used 51 times throughout the study. The college advisors consistently discussed needing PD to learn how to better support students from specific populations with accessing college.

The need for PD for advising specific student populations occurred during their first years serving as college advisors and is also an ongoing need as they continue in their positions. Miguel Angel asserted that “college advisor PD can be enhanced by centering PD on underserved students”. The other college advisors also expressed needing PD to support advising students in special circumstances, undocumented students, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning community (LBGTQA+) students, first-generation college students, African American students, Latino students, and students from low-income backgrounds. Miguel Angel talked about his need, especially during the first year of serving as a college advisor, for PD in advising students with special circumstances on accessing college,

I had to look into the logistics of how to declare some students as independent students based on their circumstances of domestic violence, abuse, incarcerated parents and how that affected their financial aid application processes. I don't think I really had a good handle on that towards the end of my first year as a college advisor. (Miguel Angel)

The FAFSA requires students to automatically apply for financial aid classified as dependent students who utilize their parents' income tax information to access financial aid. Students may be eligible to apply as independent students separate from their parents thus not needing their parents' income tax information to access financial aid due to special circumstances that they are experiencing. Filing as an independent student on the FAFSA entails a detailed process. The process includes turning in specific documentation proving the circumstance to justify why the student should be excused from providing their parents' financial information to access financial aid for higher education.

The need for PD on advising undocumented immigrant students on accessing college was also emphasized. Bre stated,

I've had a lot of trouble with helping my undocumented students. I have not been to an undocumented anything type of PD since I went maybe eight years ago, when one of the Texas Education Service Centers provided something on undocumented students and college access and that was the only training they did.

(Bre)

Mary also chimed in, “there isn't really a ton of training on how to help DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival] kids”. Undocumented students struggle accessing college due to different barriers making their journeys difficult: discrimination, fear, and lack of access to federal financial aid (Enyioha, 2019). Many undocumented students grow up in the United States and achieve primary and secondary school education yet when they attempt to pursue higher education many experience extreme barriers requiring the support and guidance of a knowledgeable and resourceful college advisor (Enyioha, 2019).

The need for college advisors to receive PD to support LGBTQA+ with college advising also emerged from the data. When asked about his confidence level with supporting students from special populations pursue college Miguel Angel said,

I think that I would be confident working at a public school with Title I student demographics, low-income, African American, Hispanic, right, but I wouldn't be able to tell you if there is a professional or recommended way to advise

LGBTQA+ students. (Miguel Angel)

Miguel Angel's statement uncovers the need for college advisors to have specific PD on advising LGBTQA+ students on college access. Learning about inclusive language, how to respect students' privacy and not out them, and how to support LGBTQA+ students holistically as they experience the college admission process are key aspects needed for college advising PD.

In addition to needing PD on advising underserved students on college, needing support working with aspiring student athletes and students from higher-income backgrounds was also noted. As Miguel Angel reflected on his areas of growth in college advising Miguel Angel stated,

My first year I was very hesitant to really engage a student athlete in a conversation. So, in the sense, if I knew the student was an athlete my first grinning question would not have been 'hey, are you interested in being a college athlete?' I would wait deliberately for the student to tell me that they wanted to just because I knew that I didn't have the full set of resources to really guide the student through that process. I know that I struggle with advising student athletes beyond my role of just approving their fee waivers for the NCAA [National Collegiate Athletic Association] Student Clearinghouse Profile. (Miguel Angel)

There are set rules that student athletes must adhere to when applying for college admission and seeking to be recruited to play on a college sports team. These rules are not always clear and can often prevent students from successfully being recruited and receiving funding to play on a college sports team. College advisors spoke on their need to learn more about these recruitment rules and how to support students in becoming athletes at the collegiate level. There are numerous different special population groups of

students who college advisors serve. It was evident in the data that college advisors need PD specific to special population student groups to learn best practices on how to support them on their journeys pursuing higher education.

Conclusion of Findings

Chapter Four described the six college advisors who participated in the study along with their associated high school settings. The findings of the study were discussed specifically detailing the themes that were identified based on the analysis. The college advisors' narratives revealed insights about their college advising training, PD, and experiences which can inform K-12, advising practice, and future research in these areas. The concluding chapter provides an overview of the study, a deeper discussion of the study's findings through application of the theoretical framework, and relates the findings to the research questions. Implications and recommendations based on the study's findings are given and the chapter is closed with concluding thoughts.

V. DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

Underserved students have an inequitable disadvantage to accessing college preparation resources in comparison to their privileged counterparts (Pineda & Drummond, 2018; Welton & Martinez, 2014). Schools tend to be the only resource for underserved students with aiding them in developing a plan for attending college (González et al., 2003; Stephan, 2013). The college advisor position in schools is a recent addition to many schools' staff which focuses on assisting students through the college admission process (Clayton, 2019). College advisors have taken on the responsibility of providing college access to underserved students, yet the research is limited on how they are prepared, trained, and professionally developed to fulfill this responsibility. Moreover, there is a dearth of research that considers the impact ecological influences have on college advisors' PD. In response to this need, the following research questions were posed to guide this multiple case study that included six college advisor participants:

1. How do college advisors serving underserved students in high school contexts describe their onboarding and ongoing professional development experiences?
2. How can an ecological framework assist in understanding the factors that shape college advisors' roles within their high school contexts and professional development experiences?
3. How can the narratives of college advisors inform best practices to support them in their roles in facilitating college access for underserved students?

The theoretical framework that provided a lens for this study consisted of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and Arnold et al.'s (2012) Ecology

of College Readiness Model. The latter was modified to be applied to college advisors' PD thus creating an Ecological Model of a College Advisor's Professional Development (see Figure 1) aiding in the examination of the influences of environment and interaction on the PD of college advisors.

Along with the theoretical framework, a multiple case study design (Baxter & Jack, 2008) with elements of a comparative case study (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) was utilized. This research design allowed for college advisors working in different high school contexts to be studied and compared as cases. Purposeful sampling (Gall et al., 2010) and criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) were used because it was important that college advisors coming from diverse backgrounds, with at least two years of college advising experience, and working at traditional public, charter, and private high schools in Texas, serving at least 50% of students from underserved backgrounds be represented in this study. Six college advisors meeting the study's criteria served as participants and were studied as individual cases: two from traditional public, two from charter, and two from private high schools (see Figure 4).

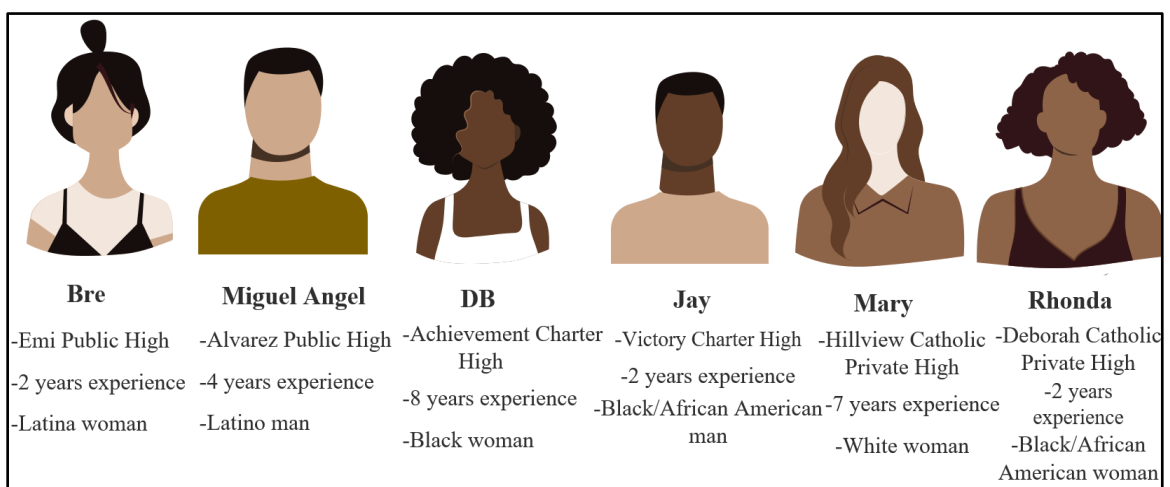


Figure 4 *Participant Demographics*

Data collection consisted of a demographic questionnaire; document collection (Gall et al., 2010) of resumes, job descriptions, and documents related to the participants' college advising roles; an hour semi-structured, individual interview (Patton, 2002) with each of the six participants facilitated virtually; a focus group (Gall et al., 2010) facilitated virtually, and a researcher's journal (Merriam, 2009). Merriam's category construction (2009) aided in data analysis as well as Saldaña's (2009) In Vivo coding and focus coding. A running list of 729 codes was reduced to 312 codes which then were grouped into categories. Fourteen categories emerged and were consolidated to the six themes that were presented as the findings in Chapter IV: *informal training, self-teaching, and learning with the students; all things college related; relationship building & collaboration; advocacy: going above and beyond to assist; barriers college advisors face; and college advisors' need for PD for advising specific student populations.*

What follows are key findings in relation to each of the three research questions. The Ecological Model of a College Advisor's PD framework (see Figure 1) was applied in this process with a focus on the factors that stood out as having an influence on the roles and PD of each college advisor within their high schools. The implications and recommendations based on the study's findings for policy, practice, and research are then discussed along with ideas for future research.

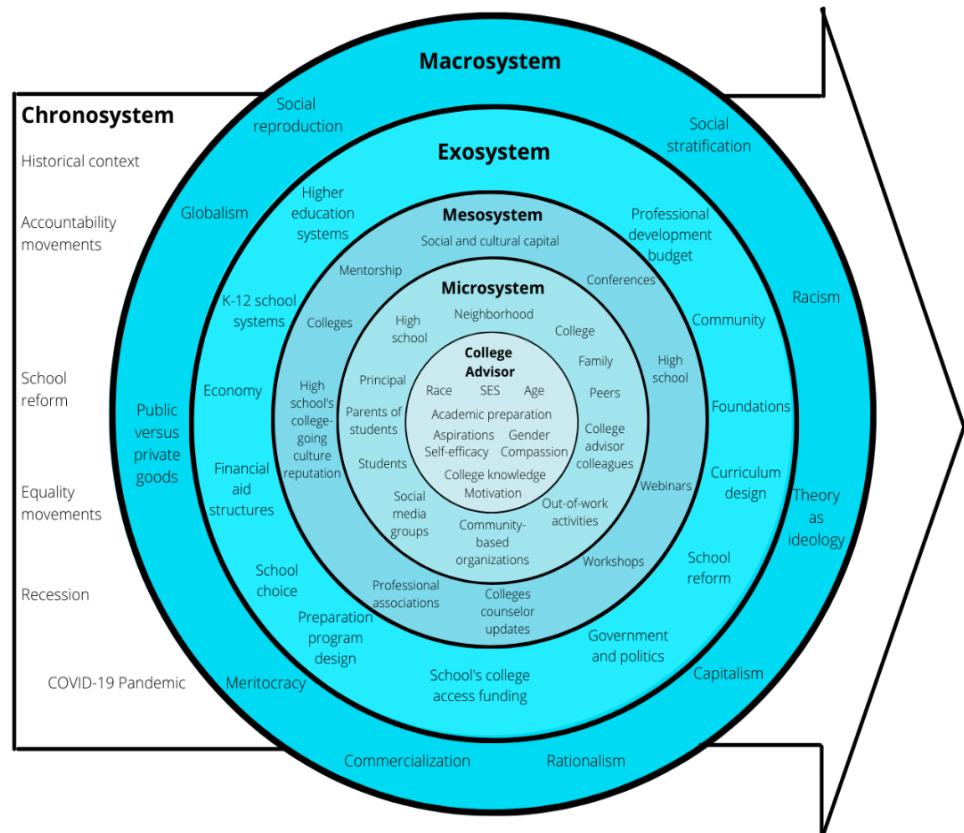


Figure 1 *Ecological Model of a College Advisor's Professional Development*

How do College Advisors Serving Underserved Students in High School Contexts

Describe Their Onboarding and Ongoing PD Experiences?

The college advisors in this study described their onboarding and ongoing PD experiences as engaging in informal training, self-teaching, and learning with students. This was a theme in the data and is directly related to the college advisors' microsystems. All the college advisors discussed receiving forms of informal training on college advising during their first year in their roles. Many of the college advisors stated that they received informal training from their college advisor colleagues. In the Ecological Model of a College Advisor's PD (see Figure 1), college advisor colleagues are in college advisors' microsystems. College advisor colleagues are a part of the community that the

college advisors are in and they have frequent interactions. The data revealed that many college advisors met colleagues through school district/network meetings, conferences, and professional associations. These colleagues were key in the development not only during the studied college advisors' first years serving in their roles but also as they continue in college advising. The college advisor colleagues provided college advising advice and knowledge, best practices, and share resources with college advisors aiding them in better supporting their students. This is congruent with Clayton's (2019) findings regarding the importance of college advisors having a network of colleagues they can rely on for help. The college advisor colleagues were described as having multiple years of experience in the college advising field, as mentors to college advisors who informally taught them about different aspects of college advising, and who allowed college advisors to reach out to them anytime they needed assistance. It is important to note that mentorship is a part of the mesosystem level. The mentorship that the college advisor colleagues provided college advisors is also a form of social and cultural capital which is an influence in the mesosystem. The college advisors who had access to mentorship were able to utilize that mentorship as a tool to guide their development as college advisors.

The studied college advisors also described their onboarding and ongoing PD experiences as being derived from self-teaching. The drive to teach oneself comes from being motivated. Motivation is an influence located at the individual level. Many of the college advisors spoke about how they taught themselves how to be a college advisor since they were not provided formal training by their schools, which is reflective of the kinds of limited PD experiences the college advisors in Clayton's (2019) study described. College advisors' compassion, an influence in the individual level, for supporting

underserved students through the college admission process along with their motivation encouraged them to teach themselves and learn as they assumed their college advisor positions. Several of the college advisors in this study cited their existing college knowledge from their own journeys pursuing higher education, which is also located at the individual level, as a source of capital contributing to their development as a college advisor. In this way, college advisors utilized their lived experiences accessing college as a foundation to supporting students. Almost all the college advisors in this study discussed how they especially connected on an identity level with students who share similar racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. The college advisors saw themselves in their students as if they were looking in the mirror. They connected culturally with students to work to meet what support they felt they themselves had needed during the college admission process and in turn now provide that to students. The college advisors all discussed humbling themselves openly admitting to students that they did not have all the college advising answers but were willing to learn with them to find the answers.

As such, the college advisors in this study credited learning with their students as contributing to their onboarding and ongoing PD experiences. The students whom college advisors served were in their microsystem levels. College advisors interact with students daily. The college advisors discussed how they called higher education institutions with students on speaker phone as well as screen shared with students while researching online to gain answers to questions. When this happened the college advisors demonstrated to students how to seek assistance when they had a college admission question while the college advisors also learned the answer to the question themselves.

All the college advisors also described attending college counselor updates as an important element to their ongoing PD experiences that enabled them to stay updated on different college offerings. College counselor updates are free, in-person events with limited capacity hosted by higher education institutions. Their purpose is to quickly educate college advisors on updates to their admission and financial aid processes as well as new features offered on-campus. College advisors must register to attend a college counselor update. After the colleges present at the update the high school college advisors are often provided with a meal.

Capitalism and commercialization can be found in the macrosystem level as both affect higher education in the United States and directly impact college advisor PD as they are ideologies “that shape social structures” (Arnold et al., 2012, p. 77). The costs of attending college continues to rise and there are thousands of higher education options in the United States (Agasisti & Johnes, 2015). College counselor updates assist college advisors not only with learning about what different higher education institutions have to offer students but also in staying up to date with the rising costs to attend the vast offering of colleges. Colleges are impacted by the market of thousands of college offerings. Colleges must outreach to college advisors to educate them on the uniqueness of their colleges to in turn try to convince students to attend their respective institutions. The more knowledge that college advisors have on college offerings the better that they can support students with making decisions on which colleges to attend. The following section responds to the study’s second research question.

How can an Ecological Framework Assist in Understanding the Factors that Shape College Advisors' Roles Within Their High School Contexts and Professional Development Experiences?

The Ecological Model of a College Advisor's PD (see Figure 1) provides a lens that draws attention to the factors that shape college advisors' roles within their high school contexts. In applying the model to the six participants in this study, particular influences from the different system levels of the theoretical framework were identified in each college advisors' case and are highlighted to provide a comparison of the different school contexts in which the college advisors worked in. Following is a section focused on other shared or key factors shaping the roles of college advisors.

Bre

Emi Public High requires that the college counselor position have a Texas school counselor certification. Bre stated in her narrative that she had been working at Emi Public High for a year as a school counselor when the college counselor position became available. The principal promoted her to the college counselor position aware that Bre did not have any prior experience with college advising. Bre's preexisting connection with the school as a current staff member who was familiar with the culture of Emi Public High, her social capital, which is an influence located in the mesosystem level, along with her having a school counselor certification aided in her being selected for the college counselor position. The school district that Emi Public High is a part of crafted the job description of the position to have only one requirement which is the school counselor certification. The rest of the minimum qualifications section states that the person must have the ability to work with parents, teachers, students, and college recruiters. It is

interesting that it is asking for the person to be able to work with college access stakeholders as if the district intended to provide training to the person entering the role. By the district not requiring specific previous college advising experience they then put the professional in the position where they will have to learn how to be a college counselor while already in the role. Bre stated that she did not receive any training on becoming a college counselor from her district or school and everything that she has learned has been what she has taught herself in her role. Her college counselor position does not have a PD budget, which is an influence located in the exosystem level, thus only allowing Bre to attend PD opportunities that are free except for being a TACAC member and attending the TACAC conference which is paid for by her school district.

Bre's caseload had a high college counselor-to-student ratio consisting of 510 seniors while she was the only college counselor employed by the school to serve the seniors' college access needs. This reiterates Perna et al.'s (2008) finding that a challenge with college advising in public schools is the high student-to-college counselor ratio due to other school priorities. It also uncovered the school district's as well as the school's principal's priority level for providing college advising for their students. The school principal can decide how they utilize faculty and staff positions on campus (Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2017) and could dedicate more staffing resources to supporting the large senior class with college advising. Bre's principal is an influence located in her microsystem level who impacts the roles she has at her school as the principal's staffing decisions directly affects Bre's student caseload size. Bre also did not have a data tool such as Naviance to support her with tracking student data and this was due to her school district and school not providing funding for a data tool software. The school's college

access funding is an influence located in the exosystem level and directly impacts Bre's role at her school as she manually keeps track of seniors' college and financial aid application data on a spreadsheet. Bre was the only college advisor in this study who did not have a school district funded data-tracking measuring tool.

Miguel Angel

Like Bre, Miguel Angel was already working at Alvarez Public High when the college advisor role became available. The position's job description was vague and focused on project coordination with only one mention of college advising. The minimum requirements were a bachelor's degree and three years of related work experience. The job description was intentionally crafted to be broad to allow for more candidates to be considered for the position. Miguel Angel served as an AVID elective teacher who partnered with the previous college advisor to assist his AVID students with their college applications. Other than his experience with AVID, Miguel Angel did not have prior college advising knowledge when entering his new role. He was a trusted professional within the school and had a strong relationship with his principal which supported him in being selected for the role. Miguel Angel's social and cultural capital, an influence located in the mesosystem level as well as his principal, an influence located in the microsystem level, aided him in earning the role of college advisor. Similar to Bre, Miguel Angel also did not receive formal training during his first year in the college advisor role; however, he did receive guidance and mentorship from colleagues. College advisor colleagues are an influence located at the microsystem level, mentorship is an influence in the mesosystem level, and both influences aided Miguel Angel with training during his first year of serving as a college advisor. Miguel Angel stated that he did not

have a school PD budget, like the college counseling staff in Perna et al., (2008)'s study, which is an influence in the exosystem level that impacts the PD opportunities that he is able to attend. He applied and received a fellowship through TACAC that waived his membership and conference fees for a year. Professional associations are an influence located at the mesosystem level. The Texas Association for College Admission Counseling impacted Miguel Angel's PD by providing Miguel Angel with free PD opportunities through conferences and webinars, influences located in the mesosystem level, to grow his college advising skillset. Something that stood out about Miguel Angel's college advising role at his school was the expectation of fulfilling administrative duties.

Miguel Angel described having a lot of administrative duties and playing a key role on the campus leadership team, even being utilized to assist with classroom evaluations of teachers. These administrative duties came as a directive from the school principal, an influence in Miguel Angel's microsystem level. At Alvarez Public High the college advisor position was utilized for providing support to the school by serving as a campus leader, meeting students' college advising needs, and building the school's college-going culture. Miguel Angel was also the only school-funded college advisor at Alvarez Public High which put him in a position of having to prioritize which students to serve; a challenge that is congruent with those identified by Bettinger and Evans (2019). Relating back to building his school's college-going culture, Miguel Angel mentioned that he had served as a college advisor at Alvarez Public High for four years prior to him receiving his first college counselor fly-in invitation. The school's reputation of not having a college-going culture contributed to lack of invitations. A school's college-

going reputation is an influence located in the exosystem level and impacts the number of opportunities a college advisor receives to visit college campuses for little to no expense to the college advisor.

DB

DB's position as the Director of College Counseling was slightly different from the other college advisors in the study as DB's role led and managed the college counseling team consisting of multiple college advisors. She also provided college counseling support to students. The job posting for DB's position stated that a master's degree along with three years of professional experience in college access or admission advising was preferred. DB started her career by serving as a college admission representative for three years and director of college admission and recruitment for two years. She then transitioned over to the high school side of the college access world and worked as a college counselor at a private, affluent, all-girls high school for five years. DB entered the Director of College Counseling role at Achievement Charter High with a Doctorate in Ethical Leadership, experience in college admission recruiting, leadership, and college counseling. DB had strong academic preparation and college knowledge, both influences located at the individual level, when entering her role. Achievement Charter High hired a professional for the role whose qualifications exceeded the job posting's requirements which shows the school's efforts in recruiting and hiring an experienced professional to serve their students. Someone who understands both the counseling and admission perspectives and can offer students guidance on both. DB's previous work as a college advisor in a private, affluent school offered her a similar experience as serving as an independent educational consultant (Smith & Sun, 2016): she

assisted affluent families through the college admission process which typically consists of applying to more competitive colleges with the expectation of the families not needing to apply for financial aid and being prepared to pay full tuition prices out-of-pocket.

Working at the private school DB received a plethora of college counselor fly-in invitations solely based on the college-going profile of her school. DB attended these fly-ins, an influence located in mesosystem level, and continued to expand her knowledge of college options for students. When DB moved from serving at the private, affluent school to Achievement Charter High, she had to teach herself how to work with a different demographic of students. DB focused on providing guidance to underserved students who almost all needed the assistance of financial aid to attend college. Her approach to college advising changed as she kept in mind needing to include college options for students to apply to that offered strong financial aid support. Her knowledge of applying to competitive colleges helped as she was able to challenge her students to put colleges on their lists to apply to that they were not guaranteed admission but if they were to be admitted, would provide the students with more social capital opportunities through the college's network potentially impacting students' career trajectories.

DB also had to learn more about the process for applying for financial aid while at Achievement Charter High. The school's foundation and regional office, influences in the exosystem level, helped provide financial aid training for DB. In addition to providing DB with financial aid training, Achievement Charter High as well as the school's foundation both fund DB's PD budget that pays for her professional association membership fees, attendance at the TACAC and NACAC annual conferences, and a College Board conference. These influences are both located at the exosystem level.

Achievement Charter High has demonstrated their value of hiring highly qualified professionals to serve the college access needs of their underserved students. The school has also revealed their value of continuing to develop and support the professionals while they are providing college advising to students. Having funding support to attend PD opportunities impacts the college advisors' PD as it allows for the college advisor to identify and attend PD that they need to better serve students. DB received the most PD support at her school compared to the other college advisors in the study.

In her narrative DB discussed personal experiences with racism and oppression as a Black woman. DB's race and gender are influential identities located at the individual level. These identities impact how DB experiences the world (Grant & Zwier, 2011), and by extension contributes to what motivates DB to advocate for students of color and empower them to pursue higher education. Racism is an influence located at the macrosystem level. Racism is used in the United States to divide and oppress non-White people (Serna & Woulfe, 2017). It is recommended that individuals working in leadership positions in higher education "continue to address issues of ethnic disparity and find opportunities to address and combat discriminatory stratifying patterns" (Ramsey et al., 2020, p. 33). DB acknowledges the discriminatory patterns in higher education and makes it a point to work to combat racism in her college access work. Racism impacts DB's PD by driving her to seek out additional PD opportunities to provide her with the skills to continue to enhance her college advising work with students of color. DB enables students of color to pursue higher education thus working against their historic oppression of not having access to college. Equality moments located at the chronosystem level such as the Black Lives Matter Movement in 2020 in response to

police brutality resulting in the murder of George Floyd, an unarmed African American man, prompted more higher education institutions to offer critical conversations and PD opportunities centered on diversity and inclusion as well as initiatives to recruit and retain more Black students (Crow, 2021). The Black Lives Matter Movement has brought more awareness to the higher education landscape regarding the inequitable access and representation of African Americans in higher education. DB pointed out that prior to the Black Lives Matter Movement there were few PD offerings hosted by colleges focusing on serving African American students.

Another item that stood out in DB's case was how Achievement Charter High had one of the largest college counseling teams seen in this study consisting of four staff members employed by the school as well as a part-time college advisor employed by Advise Texas. The college retention specialist focuses primarily on working with first-year college students from Achievement Charter High, but the other staff serves the college access needs of the junior class of 140 and senior class of 131 students. The relatively low student-to-counselor ratio reveals Achievement Charter High and their school network's commitment to supporting students with pursuing college (Perna et al., 2008). The K-12 system that Achievement Charter High operates in, an influence in the exosystem level, impacts DB's role at her school as it determines the amount of college counseling staff provided to each school within their system thus impacting student-to-counselor ratios. Like the other participants DB discussed the barrier of needing additional staff and time especially to be able to provide more individualized college advising to students. While her team is larger than others much of the college counselors' time is spent teaching college seminar courses. Similar to DB, Jay also served within a

charter school context however, he expressed the challenge he experienced earning a college advisor position.

Jay

Jay revealed in his narratives that the high school college advisor positions are competitive, and it can be difficult to secure a college advisor job if one had not already had a connection with the high school such as having worked at the school or know someone at the school such as the principal who has hiring authority. Principals are likely to facilitate the hiring process based on their own opinions rather than processes that are research-based (Kimbrel, 2019). The process for Jay becoming employed as a college advisor was difficult because he did not have any connections with high schools. He previously served as a college admissions representative who recruited students to attend the college he represented but he had not worked at a high school. Half of the college advisors in this study discussed being hired from within the schools they were already working at: Bre, Miguel Angel, and Rhonda. Jay's microsystem and mesosystems levels did not consist of similar influences aiding him in being selected for a college advisor position. Jay did not have an already established relationship with a high school principal, an influence located in the microsystem level, nor did he have the social and cultural capital located in the mesosystem level to connect him with someone working at a school who could help him get hired. Hora (2020) challenged the idea that

Students simply need to get into college, work hard to complete a program in a marketable discipline, and gainful employment will follow...[the study questioned] but is this really an accurate depiction of the relationships among college, skill, credentials, and graduate employment? (p. 308).

Hora found that job acquisition is significantly influenced by social and cultural capital.

Prior to working as a college admission representative Jay served as a program coordinator for a youth job readiness program where one of his roles was to assist students with the college application process. After applying to numerous college advisor positions Jay was selected for a job at Victory Charter High. On the Victory Charter High college counselor job posting it stated that the professional must have two or more years of experience in either high school counseling and/or the college admission field. This shows how the school wanted someone in the position who had previous experience on either the high school college counseling side or the college admission side. Even with the requirement of previous experience the charter school network, an influence in the exosystem level, provided Jay with training during his first year. Jay described the training he received as helpful for advising traditional students to attend 4-year colleges but lacking in training him on how to advise students who had decided they were not going to attend college and needed help coming up with a different plan for after high school. During his first year as a college advisor Jay attended college counselor updates, an influence in the mesosystem level, as well as school network mandated PD days. He had a PD budget of \$1,000 for him to utilize on PD opportunities which is an influence in the exosystem level. Something unique that stood out in Jay's narrative was his duty of teaching sections of the school's college seminar course yet not having any teaching experience and not receiving training on teaching and classroom management. The charter school system and its curriculum design, influences in the exosystem level, had the expectation of Jay to teach yet did not help develop him to know how to teach. This expectation is similar to professors teaching at the collegiate level without having

previous teaching experience which was a finding in a study by Varghese (2020). It was revealed that faculty teaching an advanced course for a Master of Social Work

Drew largely on their own experiences as student learners and social work practitioners and did not have much formal training in teaching and student learning...[and] many of the schools did not have formal faculty development opportunities [for teaching support] (Varghese, 2020, p. 145).

Jay has learned on his own how to teach and facilitate the college seminar courses.

Unlike Jay, Mary duties in her role do not consist of teaching in a classroom.

Mary

Mary's career began in college advising when a lead school counselor at a large public high school hired her to assist her with providing college advising to students. The lead school counselor informed Mary that she was not able to fulfill the college guidance support duties of her role due to focusing on academic course scheduling, leadership duties, and providing social and emotional support counseling to students. Mary served as the lead school counselor's assistant and through mentorship, an influence in the mesosystem level, she trained Mary on how to serve as a college advisor. She sent Mary to college counselor updates, and guided Mary during her first two years serving in the role as college and scholarship specialist. That same lead school counselor then recommended Mary for a college advisor position at a private school. Mary's colleague, who is an influence located in the microsystem level, spoke with the principal of Hillview Catholic High regarding Mary's positive work at the public high school. Mary was then hired to serve as the new College Advisor. The college advisor job description posting stated that a minimum of two years of experience in college advising, school counseling,

and/or college admission was required for the position. Hillview Catholic High hired a professional who had previous college advising experience and came recommended. The school provides Mary with a PD budget, an influence located in the exosystem level, which pays for Mary's annual membership fees for both TACAC and NACAC, influences located in the mesosystem level. The school also funds Mary to attend both annual conferences, an influence located in the mesosystem level. The principal guards Mary's work time and designates it solely to college advising; however, it is important to note that Mary was the only college advisor for her school serving 400 students in total and specifically focusing on the senior class of 100 students. While the principal, an influence located in the microsystem level, protected Mary's time he did not provide her with additional staff assistance to lessen the number of students on her caseload. This shows the impact the principal has on Mary's role at the school. Like Mary, Rhonda also worked within a private school context.

Rhonda

Rhonda started her career on the higher education side by serving two years as a college admission and student advisor at a university. Rhonda informed prospective students about the admission requirements for the university as well as provided academic advising to aid students with enrolling in courses needed for their degree plans. She left the position to then work as the Development Coordinator at Deborah Catholic High. After working at the school for two years, the principal at Deborah Catholic High essentially recruited Rhonda to move from the development and fundraising office at the school to the college counseling team to serve as the College Counselor and Registrar. Prior to Rhonda entering the role her principal highly encouraged her to pay for her own

training and complete an online, college counselor certificate program from the University of California San Diego Extension program. In Rhonda's college counselor and registrar job posting it states that both experience guiding families through the college admission process and possessing a college counseling certificate are preferred but not required for the position. In this case it was evident how the principal had a trusting relationship with Rhonda to where she knew that she wanted to hire her to serve in the position but wanted to ensure that Rhonda had a foundation of knowledge on college counseling. The fact that the principal knew about the rare option of the University of California San Diego offering a college counseling certificate through their extension program shows that she understood the need for professionals to be trained on college counseling when serving students. However, it was interesting that the principal did not offer to utilize school funds to help pay for Rhonda's college counseling certificate and instead left Rhonda to somewhat of an ultimatum of her coming out-of-pocket for the training if she wanted to serve in the college counselor position. Again, this shows the impact and power the principal has on the college advisor role.

Rhonda served on a college counseling team of three college counselors, one of which was the director of college counseling who she directly reported to. The director of college counseling provided mentorship, an influence in the mesosystem level, to Rhonda during her first year serving students with college counseling. Rhonda had a caseload of 25 seniors and 42 juniors which is one of the smaller college advisor caseloads seen in this study. While Rhonda had a smaller caseload of students which allowed for a lower student-to-counselor ratio, a large responsibility of hers was to teach sections of the college seminar course. Rhonda did not have previous teaching experience and was not

provided with training on how to teach and manage a classroom. The principal encouraged Rhonda to engage in college counseling training but not training to learn how to teach, therefore, Rhonda spent a lot of time and effort creating plans for each class. The following section details the significant themes revealed in the study's data in response to the study's guiding research questions.

Other Shared or Key Factors Identified Using the Ecological Model

The COVID-19 pandemic occurred during the duration of this study and it is important to acknowledge its impact on the roles of the college advisors at their schools. The COVID-19 pandemic is an influence located in college advisors' chronosystem levels. All the college advisors in the study reported that when the COVID-19 virus spread to Texas in March 2020, the schools quickly switched to virtual learning which required creativity from the college advisors as they worked to provide virtual college advising support to their students on deciding which colleges they would commit to attending. The college advisors discussed how they met with students individually over virtual platforms and would share their computer screen with the students when researching answers to college questions and showing the students a breakdown of what a financial aid offer letter means regarding the amount of scholarship, grant, and loan money the college has provided the student to assist with paying their cost to attend. The pandemic brought uncertainty in the college admission world (Baker et al., 2020). Many seniors questioned delaying their college start due to the pandemic causing what was considered the traditional college experience, matriculating in the fall and living on campus attending in-person courses and events, to the shift to virtual courses with limited in-person college activities. The pandemic impacted the college advisors in this study's

roles in different ways. Jay, Miguel Angel, and Rhonda all mentioned that the pandemic brought on their additional roles of temperature checking the students who attended in-person school as they entered the building as well as working to enforce other COVID-19 safety precautions. DB discussed her role of helping provide students with laptops and internet hotspots to aid them with engaging in virtual learning from their homes. All the college advisors talked about facilitating their FAFSA nights virtually to support families through submission of the financial aid application.

Another common influence in the college advisors' microsystem impacting their roles within their schools were their principals. Their principals' values, priorities, and support directly impacted the college advisors' PD in this study. Miguel Angel discussed his principal's competitive nature regarding wanting to have better college, career and military ready (CCMR) data than the other local public schools. Since Miguel Angel's principal is supportive of the school's students pursuing higher education and meeting designated CCMR metrics Miguel Angel has the authority to schedule times to meet with students while in class as well as call students out of class to meet individually for college advising. Accountability movements and school reform are influences located in the chronosystem that are connected to CCMR and standardized testing. These influences significantly impact the school roles of Bre and Miguel Angel as they both notably spoke about the amount of effort and time they spend on facilitating standardized testing, especially the TSI to their students. It was observed from the data that the two public school college advisors spoke the most about receiving pressure from their principals regarding school accountability and CCMR. The charter school college advisors chimed in briefly about CCMR but did not express nearly the amount of frustration with it

impacting their roles as how the public school college advisors did. The private school college advisors did not discuss experiencing frustration or stress with school accountability at all within their roles. Rhonda only chimed in about how she was responsible for facilitating the PSAT and School Day SAT. Mary stated that she does not have to facilitate any testing. At Hillview Catholic High there is a principal who has the duty of organizing testing for the students. However, Mary and Rhonda both talked about frustration with the low scores their underserved students receive on standardized testing which limits their scholarship funding eligibility as well as college attendance options (González Canché, 2019). Every college advisor participant in this study shared the same frustration for the barrier of low college entrance exam scores. They also all discussed their roles of tracking and maintaining student data such as exam scores, college and financial aid application completions, college acceptances, and scholarship award amounts. All the college advisors' principals require that the college advisors track this data. Some require the data for school accountability purposes in addition to supporting all students with accessing college. Like how Miguel Angel discussed having a supportive school principal Mary also talked about having her principal's support.

Mary spoke to how her principal guarded her work time, not allowing her to sponsor any extracurricular activities, and dedicated her role to solely assisting students with college advising. Mary's principal values students pursuing college and supports maximizing the amount of time Mary spends assisting students through the college admission process. Mary's dedicated college advising time relates to the theme of college advisors roles within their high school contexts consisting of all things college related. All six of the college advisors discussed how their roles at their schools consisted of all

things college related. The college advisors discussed educating students, families, and teachers on the college and financial aid application processes. Students, parents, and teachers are all located in the microsystem level of college advisors. A part of college advisors' PD is learning and staying updated on the college access and admission field so they in return can educate their students, parents, and teachers. In addition to this role of educating others on college advising, the study's data revealed that three out of the four college advisors working in charter and private school contexts had the role of formally teaching college preparation seminar courses at their schools. This teaching requirement is due to the K-12 school system models and curricula designs that the school networks that Achievement Charter High, Deborah Catholic High, and Victory Charter High are a part of operate in which require college advisors to serve as classroom teachers.

Kindergarten through twelfth grade school systems and curriculum design are influences in college advisors' exosystem levels. The data revealed how K-12 school systems and their curricula designs impact the roles of college advisors at their schools even though the college advisors do not have direct contact with these influences. Achievement Charter High, Victory Charter High, and Deborah Catholic High all require their college advisors to serve as classroom teachers which takes away from their time providing individualized, direct college advising to students. Emi Public High, Alvarez Public High, and Hillview Catholic High operate in K-12 systems that do not have curricula designs that mandate college advisors to serve as teachers therefore, Bre, Miguel Angel, and Mary do not have the role of teaching at their schools. Building their school's college-going culture is a role of all six of the college advisors. The high schools that the college advisors work at are in the college advisors' microsystem levels. High schools not

having a strong college-going culture, an influence in the mesosystem level, impacts college advisors' role at the schools as the college advisors then have the responsibility of working to convince students and teachers to buy-in to the reality that students can and will attend college. A role of the studied college advisors is to work to create the schools' expectations that students will attend college after high school.

Another influence impacting college advisors is school choice, an influence located in the exosystem level, which affects the school contexts available for college advisors to work in. As a result of school choice, parents have the freedom to choose “the best K-12 education options for their children. These options not only include traditional public schools, public charter schools, public magnet schools, but also private schools, online academies, and homeschooling” (National School Choice Week, 2019, para. 1). School choice has increased the offerings of school options and these options have more autonomy on how they operate and serve students than what public schools have thus directly impacting how schools choose to facilitate their college access programming. The charter and private schools in this study had more requirements on the front end of college advisors entering the role than what the public schools in this study did, such as hiring professionals with previous college admission and/or college counseling experience. Both charter schools as well as one out of the two private schools in this study had a college counseling team of three school staff members. Both public schools represented in this study only had one school-funded college advisor. All the charter and private school college advisors in this study had significantly smaller student caseloads than the public school college advisors. This is related to the K-12 systems and structures that the schools operate in which is in exosystem level. Charter and private school

systems can decide how many students they serve and intentionally decrease the student-to-educator ratio.

Aspiration, compassion, and motivation are additional influences located at the individual level that all studied college advisors shared as factors impacting their roles. All six college advisors took on the informal role of serving as advocates who went above and beyond to assist students which revealed itself as a theme in the study's data. This was not a role that they were officially assigned but more so a role that they each decided to have which stemmed from college advisors' aspirations, compassions, and motivations. The college advisors shared experiences such as being intentional about staying updated on college campuses' diversity and inclusion culture and climate in effort of advising their students on which colleges promote a welcoming environment for underserved students and steer them away from colleges that do not. They also discussed how they spent time outside of work hours supporting students, taught themselves about taxes to help students complete financial aid applications, and aided students through enrollment in college which consisted of college advisors additionally assisting them with registering for first-year orientation, applying to live in the residence halls, and closing any loose ends that could prevent students from attending college immediately in the fall. It is important to note that the college advisors in the study expressed how they were required to lead students up to the point of being admitted to college but after that were not required or held accountable for helping students navigate the remaining steps. The examples the college advisors provided prove how they went above and beyond their assigned roles to advocate for and support underserved students with pursuing college.

The studied college advisors at their cores are motivated to assist underserved students with college access because they are compassionate about students and truly aspire for the students to have the opportunity to achieve a college degree. It was evident in the data that the college advisors in the study view their positions more than just a job but as a service to their underserved students. The college advisors are “change agents with the power to influence campus climates and shape institutional policies” (Davis & Markley, 2000, p. 268). They go above and beyond their required roles to assist underserved students because they are compassionate about eliminating as many barriers as possible that are within their control that prevent underserved students from attending college. The underserved students who the college advisors serve are in the college advisors’ microsystem levels. The college advisors in the study discussed how they work to get to know students and build relationships with them to aid in earning students’ trust. This trust then helped them with providing college advising to students. It was evident that the relationships that the college advisors in the study built with students are deeper than the surface level of solely college advising as the college advisors took on completing extra tasks to provide additional support to students. Just as college advisors have an impact on students, students have an impact on college advisors regarding the roles that college advisors embrace at their high schools.

DB seeking to learn about college campuses’ diversity and inclusion climate stemmed from the impact of racism which exists in college advisors’ macrosystem levels. DB is conscious that she is serving students of color who experience racism and the harm that racism causes. She works to try to shield the underserved students she serves from attending colleges that are known not to be inclusive of students of color. As many of the

students she serves are first-generation college students they often are not aware of how a college campus' environment can impact their happiness and success in college essentially influencing whether students graduate. The data in the study revealed how racism influenced DB to take on an advocacy role in her college advising position. Although all the other college advisors in this study did not outwardly name the impact of racism on their college advising roles, the fact that they all serve at least 50% of students coming from Latino, African American, and/or low-income backgrounds, the population they serve are directly affected by racism thus impacting the college advisors' roles and PD. The higher education system in the United States has historically had practices forbidding or making it extremely challenging for people of color to attend (Soares, 2007). This history as well as the present is one of the reasons the college advising position in schools serving underserved students exist in effort to aid with equity in college access. The college advisors in this study played a role in combating racism in higher education by assisting underserved students with accessing college.

How can the Narratives of College Advisors Inform Best Practices to Support Them in their Roles in Facilitating College Access for Underserved Students?

The college advisors in the study discussed how they felt a one size fits all approach to college advising is not feasible because students have unique needs (Barnes & Slate, 2013). The narratives of the college advisors revealed the thematic finding of their need for PD for advising specific student populations: students in special circumstances, undocumented students, LBGTQA+ students, first-generation college students, African American students, Latino students, students from low-income backgrounds and students who want to play sports at the college level. The college

advisors felt that they could benefit from being provided with PD specifically on serving different groups of students. They focused on attending PD opportunities geared toward serving Latino students as they all shared serving a large percentage of this demographic. The college advisors tended to seek opportunities tailored to many students they serve but had a harder time accessing PD for serving student athletes, LBGTQA+ students, and undocumented students due to limited PD offerings on serving these groups.

The theme of the barriers college advisors face that arose from the college advisors' narratives also can inform best practices for supporting college advisors in their roles by acknowledging the barriers and working to address them. Prevalent barriers that were revealed in the data were lack of designated staff to assist with college advising, lack of time, lack of funding to attend PD events, and elitism in college counselor fly-in opportunities. All college advisors in the study talked about having an overwhelming amount of responsibilities related to serving students (Avery et al., 2014). It is evident that there is a strong need for the schools in this study to have additional staff dedicated to college advising (Schneider, 2007). With the numerous roles the college advisors have at their schools it is apparent that college advisors lack time to fully serve all of their students and complete the other work demands of their schools. The combination of lack of time and lack of funding makes attending PD opportunities difficult for college advisors congruent to Perna et al.'s (2008) findings that "not all counselors...have the ability to engage in ongoing professional development" (p. 148). Free PD offerings such as college counselor updates and fly-ins aid college advisors in their growth but as seen in the study's data there is elitism in college counselor fly-in opportunities.

The elitism in college counselor fly-in invitations for college advisors stems from social stratification and social reproduction which are both influences located in the macrosystem level. The United States operates in systems that work to socially categorize people into groups based on different privilege factors such as income and wealth (Bloomquist, 2020). Social mobility is the movement of people from one social class to another with less oppression than the previous and more privilege (Wen & Witteveen, 2021). However, the concept of social reproduction, the operation of continuing to keep people in social groups that they were born into, often hinders social mobility. United States' school systems perpetuate cycles of oppression (Bowles & Gintis, 2011). Serna and Woulfe (2017) stated,

Social reproduction theory identifies schooling as a primary means for the perpetuation of the dominant class's ideologies, values, and power. The ability to access college is so closely tied to these constructs that it contributes to this dominance and marginalization (p. 1).

Elite higher education institutions recruit students who have the ability to pay out-of-pocket for tuition, close to perfect college entrance exam scores, high grade point averages, and resumes filled with varying extracurricular activities (Soares, 2007). On average these students come from a privileged, wealthy, and White background. Elite colleges have historically served this specific type of student to intentionally continue social reproduction thus maintaining social structures of people of color and people from low-income backgrounds remaining in disadvantaged positions (Weis et al., 2014). Elite colleges strategically invite college advisors from high schools that have an elite reputation, strong college-going culture, and whose students come from wealthy

backgrounds to maintain social reproduction. The way in which college fly-in invitations are distributed impacts college advisors such as the ones in this study. The studied college advisors do not serve at elite high schools therefore they are not receiving the opportunity to visit elite colleges and learn more about them to continue to grow their knowledge of the thousands of higher education institutions in the United States. The lack of college counselor fly-in invitations affects their college advising because they are not receiving first-hand experience and PD on those college campuses thus potentially limiting college advisors in being able to provide guidance to their students based on their experiences on campuses. The college advisors are then in a position of having to decide to utilize their own money if they choose to visit and experience these elite colleges. It was also evident in the data that the theme of relationship building and collaboration is an important influence on the role of the college advisors as well as to college advisors' PD.

The relationships that the college advisors built with college admission representatives aided them with staying updated on admission information related to the specific college. The relationships also helped with serving students by aiding college advisors with knowing the status of their students' applications and supporting them through submitting items needed to fulfill application requirements. DB and Mary both attributed their rapport with college admission representatives to them receiving invitations to attend college counselor fly-ins and increase their exposure to and knowledge of different colleges which allowed them to advise students to apply to a more college options that could be great matches for the students. DB and Mary also talked about the significant impact attending the NACAC and TACAC conferences had on them building relationships with other college advisors who they contact for help and

collaborate with. Being a part of the college admission counseling associations provided the college advisors with a space to meet other college advisors and college representatives. All the college advisors in the study also discussed the strong, positive impact on their PD as well as support in their advising roles that attending yearly, college counselor updates to learn about colleges' admission and financial aid information, as well as to network with other college advisors in attendance have on them. College advisors having the opportunity to network and build relationships with other college advisors, especially those who serve the same demographics of students, helps them with access to additional college advising resources to aid in their PD. It was revealed in the data that college advisor colleagues played a key role in informally training college advisors during their first years in their positions. The narratives of the college advisors also revealed how they have the role of educating their school's teachers on the different aspects of the college admission process so the teachers could also support the students with accessing college such as through writing letters of recommendation, assisting with the college essay writing process, and encouraging students to attend college.

Implications and Recommendations Based on Study's Findings

Underserved students rely on school college advisors for guidance with the college admission process (Hirschfeld Legatt, 2015). It was seen in the study how professionals at public, charter, and private high schools all enter the college advisor position with different levels of experience and ability to provide college advising to students. Also revealed were how college advisors during their first year commonly only have access to informal training through their colleagues and mentors (Clayton, 2019). They do not typically receive training through an official entity and an implication of the

findings is college advisors' need for preparation prior to entering their positions. A recommendation for policy based on the study's findings is to create and require master's degree programs specifically for college counseling that include a college counseling certification. The degree and certification would be a policy requirement that public, charter, and private school systems could all require for the school college advisor role. The college counselor certification would require renewal every five years along with the completion of at least 200 hours of PD related to college advising. This would be like the requirement of Texas school counselors having to have a Master's Degree in School Counseling as well as a school counselor certification. The new college counseling master's degree and certification could help with ensuring that professionals entering the college advising profession all have a foundation of knowledge on working in schools, supporting a diversity of underserved students with accessing college, and college admission. It also has the potential to assist with college advisors not having to rely so much on informal training and learning while in the position. The 200-hour minimum PD requirement for renewal for the college counseling certification could assist with college counselors gaining support to designate time to engage in PD as well as provide accountability for them developing in their roles. This requirement promotes college counselors' ongoing PD as the higher education landscape continues to change. The 200-hour PD requirement could also be more specific and provide a breakdown of the percentage of hours that need to be dedicated to college admission, financial aid, and serving diverse groups of students which were areas the college advisors in the study discussed needing support with.

The findings from the study could also be used to inform practice regarding enhancing school leaders' decision making on college advisor hiring requirements. Principals can utilize the findings to inform how many years of college advising experience, serving in a school setting, and working with diverse groups of students along with educational background they should require candidates to have to be eligible for hire as a college advisor who supports underserved students with accessing college. The findings can also be used to inform school leaders' decision making on support they provide to college advisors in their roles.

Another implication from the study's findings is that the college advisors in the study attributed networking and building relationships to their PD growth in their positions. A recommendation based on this finding for practice is for schools to encourage college advisors to attend networking opportunities such as college counselor updates and to join professional associations such as TACAC and NACAC where they have the chance to meet other college advisors. The data in the study revealed the importance of college advisors having colleague support especially in the form of mentorship during their first years in the role.

Another implication for practice based on the study's thematic finding of the barriers college advisors face is the need for additional resources to support college advisors in their roles as they advise students. Public, charter, and private schools could continue to expand the college advising team at their schools by hiring additional staff (Avery et al., 2014) or utilizing current teaching staff to assist with college advising (Howard et al., 2016). This would provide underserved students with more assistance as well as lighten the college advisors' caseloads of students to a smaller number allowing

them more time to engage in PD. An additional implication is college advisors' need for PD funding support. It is recommended that school principals allot money specifically for college advisors' annual PD. This recommendation goes together with Perna et al.'s (2008) recommendation of school districts at the district-level making a commitment to supporting and providing college advisors with resources to promote their training and ongoing PD. College advisors having funding for PD from multiple sources could assist with expanding their PD options rather than them being limited to only attend free offerings.

The data in the study revealed that the college advisors worked to educate their schools' students, families, and teachers on the college and financial aid application processes. The college advisors specifically taught teachers how to write a college essay and letter of recommendation. Educating teachers of the requirements of the college admission process was something the college advisors in the study did in effort to have more teachers aware and able to provide support to students. The fact that college advisors are providing such PD to teachers raises the question as to why school districts and networks are not helping facilitate a district-wide, network-wide PD with the assistance of the college advisors? Half of the college advisors in the study were hired from within their schools to serve as a school college advisor with no college advising experience. Congruent to Howard et al.'s (2016) recommendation of educating whole school campuses on college advising, educating school faculty and staff would benefit students by providing them with more support. It would also assist with more teachers having college advising knowledge (Schneider, 2007) as the study's findings show that principals are open to promoting from within the school for the college advisor position.

The recommendation of having college advisors assist with hosting school district and network-wide PD could help with supporting college advisors with having the PD they need to accurately pass down and present the college access information to educators. It is also recommended that the public, charter, and private K-12 school systems incorporate more higher education discussion within their schools' structuring as schools have an important role in preparing underserved students to pursue higher education (Ballantine & Spade, 2015). Higher education exposure and knowledge could be incorporated into school's coursework and activities (Conley, 2010; Oreopoulos et al., 2017). More higher education discussion in schools has the potential to not only aid with building schools' college-going culture (Broda et al., 2018) but also with distributing college advising as a shared responsibility of more school staff and faculty (Hirschfeld Legatt, 2015) so it does not just fall solely on college advisors.

The AVID program exists in many public schools and aids in teaching students about different aspects of higher education but what about the students who are not enrolled in the AVID elective course? In charter and private schools college advisors teach college seminar courses to all students but as seen in the study four out of the six college advisors did not have a teaching background nor were they provided with training on how to teach. Also, the time they spend teaching in the classroom is time away that they could be spending meeting with students to assist them with their college advising needs. As teachers have the knowledge of teaching as well as having experienced attending college (Broda et al., 2018), public, charter, and private school systems could incorporate different aspects of college access knowledge in the various courses that the teachers teach (Oreopoulos & Ford, 2019): math could integrate financial aid awareness

and college cost lessons, and social studies could incorporate lessons on higher education as an organization and culture. School systems could also utilize teachers to teach the college seminar courses with guidance on the content from higher education institutions (Schneider, 2007) and the school's college advisors.

Future Research

Based on the study's findings, there are also several recommendations that can be made for future research. This study focused on the experiences and perspectives of six college advisors regarding their onboarding and ongoing PD experiences as well as their roles within their school contexts. Future research could be conducted nationwide via a quantitative study to examine college advisors' roles and responsibilities within school contexts. A quantitative study could include randomized sampling to achieve a large number of participants thus contributing to the generalizability of the findings (Kukull & Ganguli, 2012).

Many of the college advisors in the study discussed their involvement with professional associations. Future research could entail a study that focuses on NACAC and other professional associations and organizations college advisors are a part of and how they contribute to college advisors' PD. The study could investigate what the associations and organizations have learned over the years, and how they utilize their agency and reach to advocate for support for college advisors. In addition, research including the perspectives of other stakeholder groups such as school principals and leadership staff who oversee decisions pertaining to college advisor hiring as well as funding for college advisors' PD could be beneficial. The research could assist with learning the reasoning behind school leaderships' decisions on who they select to serve as

college advisors as well as the leaderships' level of awareness of the duties and roles making up the college advisor position.

Concluding Thoughts

Like the onboarding training experiences of the college advisors in the study such as Mary and Miguel Angel, I was fortunate to have a mentor who trained me for a month on everything she knew about college advising in addition to me teaching myself. Sarah did not have to mentor me yet chose to because of her passion for underserved students and wanting to ensure that I would be able to meet their college access needs. After completing my year-long internship as Sarah's college advisor substitute, I connected with my assistant principal from when I was in high school. He had been promoted to the principal position of a high school. When he learned about my passion for college advising and background, he immediately hired me to serve as his school's college advisor. Like the college advisors in the study, Bre, Miguel Angel, Mary, and Rhonda, I too was selected for the position based on my connection with a principal who had hiring power.

During my first years serving as this Title I school's college advisor we continuously experienced budget cuts which directly impacted my PD budget. I was not aware of TACAC and NACAC at the time therefore did not have involvement with these professional associations, but I did attend College Board conferences to aid with my development in providing college access to underserved students. My first year I had a PD budget of \$8,000 which allowed me to attend three different national conferences. My second year my PD budget had been cut to \$2,000 thus allowing me to attend and present at one College Board diversity conference tailored to serving Latino students. During my

third year of service, I no longer had a PD budget due to lack of funding but was reassured by my principal that if there was a PD opportunity that I really wanted to engage in that he would find and provide the funding needed. Like the college advisors in the study, I too experienced the barrier of lack of funding for PD.

This research study allowed me to investigate my curiosity about the onboarding training and ongoing PD experiences of college advisors who work with underserved students. Given the minimal PD most college advisors in the study received, the study's findings inform my own experiences considering the limited training and ongoing PD opportunities that I received while providing college access to underserved students. Similar to the duties and roles of college advisors in the study, my college advisor position also consisted of all things college related. My principal designated my position to focus on serving the college advising needs of the school. Although it was not required of me, just like the college advisors in the study, I made it a point of going above and beyond to assist and advocate for underserved students. I learned more about income taxes to support families with completing the FAFSA. I became an expert at assisting undocumented students with applying for admission to Texas public universities as well as accessing state financial aid. I acquired a Texas Notary Commission, which was paid for by my school, to eliminate the barrier that many students experience of needing to find a notary who will notarize college admission required documents for them and accept the limited, government official identification forms that they have. I utilized my supply budget to purchase postage stamps and mailed out any documents students needed to send to colleges to prevent them having to purchase stamps and make a trip to the post

office. It was my intent to make my college center classroom a one-stop-shop for underserved students' college access.

This study has provided me with a deeper understanding of the roles and experiences of college advisors empowering underserved students with college access which has reaffirmed my appreciation and respect for the work of college advisors. Underserved students need compassionate college advisors who have been educated, trained, consistently developed, and who will put in the extra effort to guide them in accessing college. It is my hope that this study informs the college advising field in supporting the onboarding training and ongoing PD growth of college advisors.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A INFORMED CONSENT FORM



Study Title: Examining the Roles and Professional Development Experiences of High School College Advisors Assisting Underserved Students

Principal Investigator: Jessica C. Enyioha **Email:** jce38@txstate.edu

Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor: Dr. Melissa A. Martinez **Email:** mm224@txstate.edu

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences, or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

My name is Jessica Enyioha and I am a doctoral student at Texas State University. I am conducting a research study titled “Examining the Roles and Professional Development Experiences of High School College Advisors Assisting Underserved Students”. The purpose of this study is to learn about the roles and professional development experiences of college advisors as they assist underserved students in high school contexts. Specifically, I want to understand what roles you have at your school, and what training and support you receive. The information gathered will be used to inform the college advising field on the professional development experiences of college advisors serving in high school contexts which could then be used to enhance the onboarding and ongoing training and support college advisors receive. I am asking you to be a part of this study because you are a college advisor with at least two years of experience serving in either a public, charter, or private high school that serves at least 50 percent of students from underserved backgrounds. This form will tell you more about the study so you can decide if you want to be in the study or not.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, you will participate in the following:

1. Complete a brief five to ten minutes background questionnaire

2. Submit documents such as resumes, job descriptions, conference agendas that you have available to you
3. Participate in a one-hour, semi-structured interview (via virtual platform), that will be audio-recorded, about your professional development and roles at your school
4. Participate in a two-hour, semi-structured focus group (via virtual platform), that will be audio-recorded, about college advisors' perspectives on professional development and the ecological factors influencing their experiences.

This study will take place virtually and you will not be required to report to a location or have any in-person contact at any point of the study.

During the individual interviews, you will be asked about your roles at your school and about your professional development experiences. The focus group will consist of six college advisors meeting together to discuss their experiences with professional development. The discussion topics include comparing college advisors' professional development experiences, discussing the process of selecting which professional development opportunities to engage in, defining what mastery of successful college advising is, and examining and applying a conceptual model to the professional development experiences of college advisors. To protect the privacy of focus group members, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms and you will be asked not to discuss what is shared in the focus group with anyone else.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

Out of precaution due to the COVID-19 coronavirus all data collection will be facilitated virtually to limit participants' risk of exposure. No physical contact will be made with or between participants and the researcher.

There is little to no risk identified for participating in this study. In discussing your experiences, you may become uncomfortable with sharing such experiences. In the event that some of the questionnaire, interview, or focus group questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you may elect not to answer any of the questions that cause discomfort. You will still be allowed to engage in the study. You will also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Should you feel discomfort after participating in the study LifeWorks is a resource that you may contact for counseling services, 512-735-2100.

BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES

There are also benefits that may result from your participation in this study. You can become more aware of your college advising professional development needs which can aid you in enhancing your work in college access. You can network with college advisors from different high schools. You can gain insight of the ecological factors that impact your roles at your high school and your professional development experiences.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of the research team and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION

You will also receive a one-time payment of a digital, \$20 Amazon gift card one month after all data collection is completed which includes: the background questionnaire, submitting documents relevant to your college advising professional development and roles to the researcher, the individual interview, and focus group.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Jessica Enyioha: 512-293-6282, jce38@txstate.edu or Faculty Advisor, Dr. Melissa Martinez: 512-245-4587, mm224@txstate.edu.

This project was approved by the Texas State IRB on [date]. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu).

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

Your participation in this research project may be recorded using audio recording devices. Recordings will assist with accurately documenting your responses. You have the right to refuse the audio recording. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio recording:

Yes _____ No _____

PRINTED name of Study Participant

Date

SIGNATURE of Study Participant

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent
(Researcher)

Date

APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL



From: jce38@txstate.edu
BBC: College Advisors' Email Addresses
Subject Line: Research Participation Invitation: <College Advisor
Professional Development Experiences Multiple Case Study>

This email message is an approved request for participation in research that has been approved by the Texas State Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Hello College Advisor,

My name is Jessica Enyioha. I am a doctoral student at Texas State University and am conducting a study about the professional development experiences of college advisors serving in high school contexts that serve underserved students. I am reaching out to ask if you would be willing to serve as a participant in the study, as you are currently serving as a high school college advisor. Participating in the study would be voluntary and consist of completing a brief, five to ten minute background questionnaire, providing me with documents relevant to your school roles and professional development (e.g. job description and resume), engaging in an individual, semi-structured interview that will take about an hour to complete, and lastly participating in a focus group discussion with other college advisors lasting for about two hours.

There are also benefits that may result from your participation in this study. You can become more aware of your college advising professional development needs which can aid you in enhancing your work in college access. You can network with college advisors from different high schools. You can gain insight of the ecological factors that impact your roles at your high school and your professional development experiences. You will also receive a one-time payment of a digital, \$20 Amazon gift card one month after all data collection is completed which includes: the background questionnaire, submitting documents relevant to your college advising professional development and roles to the researcher, the individual interview, and focus group.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer, if you participate. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind.

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

If you are interested in participating, please respond to this email to set up a time for the individual interview and select a date/time preference for the focus group.

Thank you for your time. To participate in this research or ask questions about this research please contact the principal investigator, Jessica Enyioha at jce38@txstate.edu or faculty advisor, Melissa Martinez at mm224@txstate.edu.

Best Regards,
Jessica C. Enyioha, M.Ed.

This project 7540 was approved by the Texas State IRB on 11/25/2020. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Specialist 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu)

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL



Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. The purpose of this interview is to learn about high school college advisors' professional development experiences and roles. Specifically, I want to understand how you describe your onboarding and ongoing professional development experiences as well as understand the roles you have at your school. I'd like to remind you that all interviews (individual and focus group) will be audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis, using pseudonyms to protect the privacy of participants. The interview will last a little over an hour. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

1. First, tell me about how you became a college advisor and came to work at this school?
 - A. Talk to me about the memories you have from your first year serving as a college advisor at your current school.
 - B. What surprises did you encounter during your process of becoming a college advisor?
 - C. Please explain your surprises in detail.
2. Please describe any training or professional development that you received during your first year serving as a college advisor at your current school.
 - A. How did the training/professional development or lack thereof, impact your ability to serve in your role and meet the needs of underserved students?
 - B. What forms of on-going training or professional development have you received since then?
3. In what ways can the training/professional development be enhanced to better support college advisors assisting underserved students in accessing college?
4. Reflecting on the past three years, describe in detail at least one professional development experience that you most benefited from as a college advisor.
 - A. Why?
5. Reflecting on the past three years, describe in detail at least one professional development experience that you least benefited from as a college advisor.
 - A. Why?

6. How do you describe the needs of the underserved families that you serve within your school context?

A. Please provide examples of experiences you have had working to meet the needs of families at your school?

7. What are your duties/roles, related and unrelated to college advising, at your current school context?

A. What is the percentage breakdown of your roles that make up your position at your current school context?

B. Please talk to me about any training and professional development support you have received related to each role you mentioned.

8. What topics/areas of professional development would best support you in your role as a college advisor at this point?

A. What experiences influenced your selection of topics/areas?

9. Please evaluate how your high school context has an impact on your professional development as a college advisor? (ex. Resources on campus, funding for professional development, relationships fostered with teachers, policies etc.)

A. Talk to me about the experiences that influenced your response.

10. Is there anything that you have not mentioned that you'd like to include about the professional development training and support you receive as a college advisor and/or about the roles that you have at your school?

APPENDIX D
FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL



Welcome and thank you for participating in this focus group. The purpose of this focus group is to get your feedback about your roles, college advising professional development, and learn about the ecological factors influencing your experiences. The focus group will last about two hours and will be audio-recorded and then transcribed for further analysis. I'd like to remind you that to protect the privacy of focus group members, pseudonyms will be used for all participants and I ask that you not discuss what is discussed in the focus group with anyone else. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Can you please introduce yourself, state how long you've been in your position, and give a short description of the school you work at?

1. How do you think the training and professional development you've received compares to that of other college advisors at different schools?
 - A. How do you think the fact that your school serves a large number of underserved students shapes this training and professional development?
2. Reflecting on your professional development as a college advisor, please describe your process for learning about professional development opportunities. Include how you learned about the opportunities, how you selected which ones to pursue, and why you selected them.
3. How do you define mastery of successful college advising?
4. If you were to facilitate a professional development opportunity for new college advisors what would be the essential components to include? Why?
5. Referring to the conceptual model, please select and describe three influences from the different layers that have advanced your professional development as a college advisor. [participants shown a visual of the ecological framework for the study]
6. Referring to the conceptual model, please select and describe three influences from the different layers that have the least impact on your professional development as a college advisor.
7. What advice or insights would you share with anyone coming into the college advising role at your school and why?

Is there anything else that you all would like to share?

APPENDIX E
DEMOGRAPHIC AND PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

Pseudonym (name you'd like me to use for you in dissertation):

Demographic Information

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Race/ethnicity: _____

Family background

Your father's highest level of education: _____

Your mother's highest level of education: _____

Your family's socioeconomic background/yearly income while you were in high school (check):

_____ Under 15,000	_____ 15,000 to 24,999	_____ 25,000 to 34,999
_____ 35,000 to 49,999	_____ 50,000 to 74,999	_____ 75,000 to 99,999
_____ 100,000 to 149,999	_____ 150,000 to 199,999	_____ 200,000 and over

Educational Background

Please include all higher education institutions you attended, type of degree earned, and major:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Certifications/licenses you hold:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Decision to Enter College Advising Field

What experiences influenced your decision to become a college advisor?

Professional Background

Prior to your current position as a college advisor had you ever worked in a school setting?

Yes _____ or No _____

All college advisor positions held by year, school, and district/organization

(Ex. College advisor, 2018-present, Flower High School, Rose ISD)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Current number of students assigned to your caseload: _____

Please describe the organizational leadership of college advising at your school (how many advising professionals are there and who do you report to?)

Other positions held related to college advising

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Professional associations you belong to/Professional conferences have attended since becoming a college advisor:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Professional development sessions you have attended within your district/organization:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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