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Leading from the Middle: Culturally Responsive Strategies Utilized by Mid-Level Student Services Leaders within California Community Colleges

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A Dissertation by

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ABSTRACT

Leading from the Middle: Culturally Responsive Strategies Utilized by Mid-Level Student Services Leaders within California Community Colleges

by Amandeep Kaur Kandola

Purpose: The purpose of this ethnographic study is to identify and describe how California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders are culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford's et al. (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework.

Methodology: This ethnographic study identified and described culturally responsive leadership strategies utilized by 16 mid-level Student Services leaders within the California community colleges using Horsford et al.'s (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework. Participants were identified and selected through purposeful criterion sampling. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and the collection of artifacts. The data was then analyzed and coded to identify themes and findings.

Findings: The findings of this study showcase the culturally responsive leadership strategies utilized by mid-level Student Services leaders within the California community colleges within the four dimensions of Horsford et al.'s (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework. Eight major findings and one unexpected finding emerged from the examination of the data.

Conclusions: This research study drew nine conclusions that provide greater insight and understanding of the culturally responsive leadership strategies of California community college mid-level Student Services leaders. The conclusions include regular audits of

Student Services processes and practices, orienting services through the lens of servant leadership, ongoing relevant diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development on best practices, leveraging allies and partnerships across the campus community to meet the basic needs of marginalized populations, setting aside time to reflect on decisions and interactions, hear the stories of the lived experiences of diverse staff and students, a continual focus on data to develop culturally responsive interventions, providing opportunities for staff members to lead and grow, and an active focus on hiring practices to engage diverse communities.

Recommendations: Further research is recommended to replicate this study in other higher education settings; a meta-analysis of the thematic group's studies of Culturally Relevant Leadership of California community college leaders; replication of this study with mid-level Student Services leaders of color; a comparative study on mid-level Student Services leadership practices in other states; a retrospective study on retired mid-level Student Services leaders; a study of the development of cultural agility in mid-level Student Services leaders.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The dream of having a stable well-paying job that affords a house with a white picket fence and enough income left over to support a middle-class lifestyle is what draws millions of students to higher educational institutions; higher education is the ticket to a brighter future. Although many students attain a degree from a 4-year institution, not all are ready to jump straight into that path. As such, the community college system was created to help those either seek an associate degree, pursue a career technical education certification, or explore opportunities before transferring to a 4-year institution. One unique dynamic of the community colleges can be found in the work of Kolati. In 1993, Kolati pointed out that community colleges are a "major point of entry for higher education for America's low-income youth, underrepresented ethnic minorities and new immigrants" (p. 100). What Kolati discovered about diversity of the student population of community colleges can also be found in the work of Moore and Shulock (2007). Higher education is seen as the vehicle to economic mobility in pursuit of the American dream.

Serving more than 2.1 million students a year, the California Community College system is the largest higher education system in the United States (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office [CCCO], 2020b). There are 116 colleges within the California Community College system. Each college has a similar organizational structure, consisting of a president, vice president, deans, and directors. Those in leadership positions are often tasked with leading a diverse group of employees, who then interface with an even more diverse student body. Notably, the largest sector of leaders in the community college system lies in mid-level leadership, which includes deans and directors. In some rural community colleges, the organizational structure may include

Vice President of Student Services without having a Dean of Student Services position; therefore, the Vice President of Student Services is considered a mid-level position and would be included in this study. As evidenced by the work of Kolati and others, leading in such a capacity requires unique leadership skills, one of which involves being culturally responsive. As mid-level leaders such as deans and directors of student services navigate the tricky terrain of leading their diverse team, they are often left asking questions like: How can I lead a team that is so different than me? How will my ideas be received by those who do not have the same cultural background as me? How do I report to a supervisor who is also dramatically different from me? Do I have the leadership skills necessary to lead in a culturally responsive way?

Background

This section provides a brief background of the higher education system in the State of California, followed by information on the structure of leadership more specifically on California Community College. Additionally, this section concludes with the theoretical foundations of cultural responsiveness and the intersectionality of cultural responsiveness within middle level Student Services leadership.

Higher Education in California

The California Master Plan for Higher Education was enacted into law through the Donahoe Higher Education Act in 1960. The California Master Plan for Higher Education (University of California Office of the President, 2007) established the three distinct pathways to higher education in the Golden State: the University of California, California State University, and the California Community Colleges. Each of the pathways has a defined purpose to serve the residents of California.

University of California

The University of California system offers undergraduate, graduate, and professional degrees. The Master Plan for Higher Education designated the University of California to serve the top 12.5% of the top academically performing California high school graduates. Additionally, the University of California system was designated as the research arm of the higher education system under the California Master Plan for Higher Education. There are currently 10 University of California campuses across California.

California State University

The California State University system offers undergraduate and graduate degrees, including professional preparation in teacher education. Under the Master Plan for Higher Education, California State University was designated to serve the top 33.3% of the high school graduates in the state. Although the University of California is the primary system for research, there is some limited research allowed by the California State University system. There are currently 23 California State University campuses that serve students.

California Community Colleges

The California Community College system is designated to provide vocational and lower-level undergraduate preparation under the Master Plan for Higher Education. Students can complete the first 2 years of their undergraduate degree at California Community Colleges and transfer to a California State University or University of California. Under the California Master Plan for Higher Education (University of California, 2007), the California Community Colleges were given the task to serve the

remaining Californians and remain open access to anyone who can benefit from higher education.

Diverse Student Demographics of California Community Colleges

The California Community College system consists of 73 districts with 116 community colleges that serve a diverse population roughly matching the demographics of our state. The ethnicity demographics of the students served during the 2019-2020 academic year within the California Community Colleges as reported on DataMart (CCCCO, 2021) are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

2019-2020 California Community Colleges Student Enrollment Summary by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Student Count (%)
African American	6 %
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.5 %
Asian	11%
Filipino	3 %
Hispanic	46 %
Multi-Ethnicity	4 %
Pacific Islander	0.5 %
Unknown	6 %
White Non-Hispanic	24 %

California Community Colleges have struggled with students completing; only 13% of community college students receive an associate degree after 2 years and only 31% do so within 3 years. About 48% of students who had a goal of receiving an associate degree or certificate, transfer to a 4-year school, or complete at least 60 transferrable units achieve this goal after 6 years (Public Policy Institute of California, 2019). Rates of completion are significantly lower among African American, Latino,

American Indian/Alaskan, and Pacific Islander students compared to White and Asian students (CCCO, 2017).

Additionally, California Community College leadership, faculty, and staff do not reflect the of racial and ethnic diversity of students. Between 2006-2017, students from underrepresented minorities within the California Community College system have increased from 38% to 51%, whereas the underrepresented minority tenured faculty has only increased from 19% to 21% (CCCCO, 2020b). This is significantly problematic given that diverse faculty and staff are more likely to integrate culturally responsive practices. The California Community Colleges have strived to increase student engagement and completion especially for underrepresented populations through various initiatives.

Equity-Minded Initiatives

The California Community Colleges have launched a number of major initiatives to close the achievement gap of underrepresented populations within the last decade. These initiatives include the following:

- *Student Success Act of 2012* – This act ensured that students are provided core matriculation services such as orientation, assessment, and advising (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2020).
- *Senate Bill 860*- This bill establishes a yearly requirement for colleges to create and submit annual equity plans to address specific achievement gaps of students of color (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2014).
- *Assembly Bill 705*- This legislation required the elimination of placement testing and required the utilization of self-reported information such as high

school grades and grade point average for placement (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2023)

- *Vision for Success* – In 2017, California Community College Chancellor's Office launched the Vision for Success and set forth system goals of closing the achievement gaps. Districts and colleges are required to develop goals that are same or similar to the system wide goals (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2017).
- *Guided Pathways*- The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office adopted the Guided Pathways framework to meet the ambitious Vision for Success goals. The Guided Pathways model redesigns college programs, courses, and services to provide clear pathways for students from the start of their journey to the finish line (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2020).
- *Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) Task Force* – The DEI Task Force included members from the Chancellor's Office, governing board members, Academic State Senate for California Community Colleges leadership, faculty, and staff. The goal of this group was to explore the racial and ethnicity of faculty and staff in comparison to the students that they serve (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2020b).

Although major initiatives have been launched with the intentionality of decreasing the achievement gap such as the ones mentioned previously, there has been some limited research specifically focused on how culturally responsive leadership is developed and applied in the Student Services area. The trend in the literature points to a

need for more insight regarding how to develop and train Student Services leadership in regard to cultural responsiveness.

Leading the Diverse Landscape of Community Colleges

The California Community College system has colleges that are either single college districts or multi-college districts. In single college districts, the college and the district are often one entity, and they are generally located in one location. In a multi-college district, there are often two or more colleges in the district and a distinct district office that serves the needs across the district. The CEO of a multi-college district often has the title of chancellor. Each college will have their own president who serves as the leader of that institution. In single college districts, the title of the role of the president may have the title of superintendent/president. Then there are two distinct student facing divisions of student services and academics within each college. Student services if often led by a vice president of student services (VPSS) and the academic side of the house is overseen by the vice president of instruction (VPI). The VPSS serves as the Chief Student Services Officer and the VPI as the Chief Instructional Officer for the organization. Although the titles of these positions vary slightly from one community college to the next, upper leadership is typically composed of the president and the vice presidents. Often the senior leadership such as president and vice president have served in mid-level administration within a community college district in previous roles. Unlike other industries, community college senior leaders tend to be hired from within the community college system (Ebbers, Conover, & Samuels, 2010).

Critical Role of Mid-Level Leaders Within Student Services

A vast number of mid-level managers serve under the vice presidents serving in roles of deans and directors. These mid-level leaders of today within community colleges are the future vice presidents and presidents of tomorrow. A mid-level manager's duties and responsibilities are often broad and not clearly defined (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Mid-level leaders within Student Services departments of community colleges do share some similar leadership responsibilities. They typically lead a team of employees who then serve the rest of the institution. For example, a Dean of Arts & Education oversees a group of instructional faculty who teach in the Arts & Education areas. A Director of Outreach oversees a group of staff who help with deliver outreach services. However, these titles sometimes overlap. Where one college might have a Dean of Counseling, another may have a Director of Counseling; their leadership functions are largely the same, despite their difference in title. Specifically, for Student Services, some of the traditional middle-level roles are the following: Dean of Student Services, Dean of Counseling, Director of TRiO, Director of Financial Aid, Director of EOPS, and Director of Admissions & Records. Nevertheless, titles like dean and director are often referred to as mid-level leaders within the California Community Colleges, despite the types of teams they lead.

The Vice President of Student Services leads myriad mid-level leaders. These leaders include directors and deans who oversee financial aid, counseling, EOPS, DSPS, etc. These mid-level leaders are tasked with leading diverse teams. One such team lies in the Student Services department. The division of Student Services or student affairs

continued to develop after World War II and Vietnam War to more of what we see being provided as services today.

> Student affairs was called upon to provide a wider array of services in the areas of admissions, registration and records, financial aid, housing, food services, student activities, personal and academic counseling, orientation, and special services to a growing student body. (Garland & Grace, 1993, p. 5)

Student services was given the complex task of organizing and delivering a set of responsibilities using student growth theories and organizational change practices to increase student success and maintain an institutional climate that fostered a supportive learning environment and provided opportunities for engagement (Garland, 1985).

Equity-Minded Mid-Level Leaders Within Student Services

Today's Student Services mid-level leaders manage a broad range of departments within community colleges that assist students from the first steps of their college journey through completion. According to Ozaki, Dalpes, Flyod, and Ramdin (2019), community college level student services include outreach and recruitment, enrollment and registration, financial aid, advising, and specialized programs that provide population-specific targeted programming and supports. Student services is often the first touch point for students entering a community college. Students move through certain steps called matriculation before they ever set foot in the classroom. Throughout this model there are various touch points for students. Examples of key touch points include:

- Assistance with the application from outreach or Admissions & Records.
- Developing an educational plan with a counselor.
- Meeting with a financial aid representative to discuss financial aid package.

Through the various services provided, Tinto's (1993) analysis found that student services influence outcomes by helping students have a sense of belonging to a community, which, in turn, helps them persist academically.

The role of Student Services includes promoting access, creating inclusive environments, and increasing diversity (Shushok & Perillo, 2016). According to Shushok and Perillo (2016), student service professionals need to possess the following competencies to serve students effectively:

- A willingness to embrace complexity and become a student of the multifaceted areas of expertise and perspectives that comprise the ever-dynamic academy;
- An understanding of student affairs as a learning-centered, student-focused enterprise with a fundamental responsibility to convene and connect the diverse disciplines, perspectives, and areas of expertise of the academy; and
- A commitment to associative thinking and challenging the status quo to promote innovation, creativity, and educational reform. (pp. 566-567)

Mid-level leaders lead diverse teams, who then serve a diverse student population and must model these competencies to their teams. Student Services leaders are essential in developing policy, procedures, and process within their colleges and the departments that they manage. Mid-level Student Services leaders are expected to be knowledge-wide experts on all issues related to student success. Ensuring that each department within Student Services is building a culture of inclusivity that serves the diverse student body is the responsibility of these mid-level leaders. Leaders develop this environment of inclusivity and diversity through culturally responsive leadership.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2009) defined culture as "everything you believe and everything you do that enables you to identify with people who are like you and that distinguishes you from people who differ from you" (pp. 24-25). When leading in diverse settings, culture is addressed when leaders take what is known as a culturally responsive approach. Cultural responsiveness is defined as a "cultural competency and awareness ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms" of others (MCEAP Committee on Cultural Responsiveness, 2017, p.39). Cultural responsiveness is not mutually exclusive of transformational or servant leadership. It can be utilized in addition to the other leadership styles.

Culturally Responsive Leadership in Education. A culturally responsive approach in education builds an inclusive environment for stakeholders from diverse cultural backgrounds (L. Johnson & Fuller, 2014). However, the educational leadership field has lagged in the response to increased racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity and their intersectionality (Theoharis, 2008). Intersectionality describes how race, ethnicity, gender, class, and other characteristics converge and overlap (Crenshaw, 1989). More recently, research and literature on culturally responsive leadership in education is beginning to emerge in the K-12 and higher education settings.

The research literature on culturally responsive leadership in the K-12 system is increasing. To date, two key studies have been identified regarding how leaders in K-12 system are practicing cultural responsiveness. First, Brinegar (2019) argued that middle school leaders must not solely rely on developmental characteristics of their students but also use the lens of identity to make sense of that development. Middle school leaders

must also understand the socio-historical contexts that impact students' identity. In addition to Brinegar, Hollowell (2019) found that "successful school principals are responsive to the challenges and opportunities of leading and educating students from diverse backgrounds" (p. 10). Furthermore, Hollowell contended that culturally responsive leadership was critical to addressing the equity gaps of historically marginalized, minoritized students. Although Brinegar and Hollowell's work discovered key findings related to culturally responsive leadership in K-12, they both contend that much more work is needed in this area.

Literature is also emerging about cultural responsiveness in higher education. Two key studies have been identified focusing on culturally responsive leadership in higher education. First, Cervantes (2015) found that transformational leaders in higher education who led with an equity-oriented focus and embraced cultural competency created a culture of belonging for students and staff. Second, Santamaría and Santamaría (2016) asserted that culturally responsive leaders consider race, culture, language, gender, and ethnicity in educational leadership practices.

Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework encompasses the conceptual ideas that have been developed to define, describe, understand, and apply cultural responsiveness. This section covers the theoretical framework of critical race theory and culturally responsive school leadership. Additionally, this section covers the application of cultural responsiveness to mid-level leadership in high education**.**

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) focuses on applying "legal scholarship theories on racial inequity and how race functions in society" (Ladson-Billings, 2009 p. 87). Ladson-Billings (1998) pioneered CRT in the field of education by using the framework to explore inequities. Ladson-Billings utilized CRT and applied it to education through their research on affirmative action, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and desegregation. According to Ladson-Billings (1998), the application of CRT to comprehend the systemic racism present in education is both revolutionary and unsettling. Through research and investigation of racism in education through the CRT lens, radical solutions can be developed to confront it (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Delgado and Stefanic (2001, page 3) expanded on this further and make the case that critical race theory can be utilized to not only understand how race-based structures and hierarchies exist in society but also has an activist dimension to transform it for the better. Delgado and Stefanic (2001, p. 6) identified the following as the hallmarks of CRT as:

1. *Racism is the ordinary experiences for people of color and difficult to cure and address*. This tenant purports that racism is pervasive and ordinary experiences for people of color. Racism has become more overt, subtle and engrained in our culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Additionally, the concept of "colorblindness" in American culture which believes in equal treatment across the board can only remedy some of the blatant forms of racism through legislation.

2. *Racism results in material wealth for the dominant culture so there is little interest in addressing the issue*. Bell's theory of interest convergence (1980) is an important aspect of CRT. The majority have power and thus make the common beliefs of the group. Interest convergence within CRT means that the majority white population will support racial progress to the extent there is a positive gain in it for them as well.
3. *Racism is a social construct based upon thought not based upon any actual biological or genetic differences*. People of similar origins can have similar physical features like hair and skin tone, but it does not apply to higher order traits like personality or intelligence. Delgado & Stefanic (2001, p. 6) state that "race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality".
4. *Racialization or discrimination against varying minority groups due to socioeconomic shifts.* During different periods of time, different minority groups are racialized due to the socioeconomic changes. An example of this is the Bracero Program and Operation Wetback during World War 2. Over 4 million Mexican workers were brough to the US to fill the labor needs of the United States and its allies. After the war ended, the Mexican nationals began to be deported from the United States.
5. *The intersectionality of race, gender, national origin, and sexual orientation combinations make identity complex*. This framework contends that the intersectionality of race and other identities such as sex and class make it a

complex nature of power and privilege.

6. *The voices of people of color are essential to creating a counter narrative*. Due to their different histories and experiences, it is essential to hear the voices of people of color to better understand their lived experiences. It is essential that the voices of the marginalized be heard and nurtured.

Critical race theory can be utilized as a tool in examining education inequities for marginalized students as well as culturally responsive leadership practices of leaders that serve diverse communities.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership

Gay (2010) argued that although culturally responsive teaching is important, it is equally important to focus on culturally relevant policymaking and leadership. Policy makers and school leadership should be equally engaged and practicing cultural responsiveness. Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) established four components of a culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) framework: critical self-reflection of leaders, developing culturally responsive teachers, promoting responsive environments, and engaging students in their backgrounds. Through this framework, leaders of institutions and teachers would be leading with cultural responsiveness thus leading to long-term cultural change and enhancing outcomes of students of color in the K-12 educational system.

Culturally Relevant Leadership

Another theoretical framework for cultural responsiveness is Horsford, Grosland, and Gunn's (2011) model of culturally relevant leadership. CRT serves as the foundation of the culturally relevant leadership framework. This framework utilizes research both on

culturally relevant pedagogy and antiracist pedagogy and applies it to educational leadership. Culturally relevant leadership has four major dimensions:

1. *Personal journey* – A commitment to cultural proficiency gained through self-reflection, life experiences, and the intersection of multiple personal identities. An effective leader is aware of their own personal journey as well as their own biases and assumptions about students. The leader's own personal story influences their practices.
2. *Professional duty* – A leader's education, preparation, and experience all influence their practice. This is characterized by a sense of obligation to lead for equity, engagement, and excellence.
3. *Pedagogical approach* – The pedagogical strategies utilized to build a culturally relevant and antiracist school culture. A culturally relevant leader establishes a school climate that is culturally affirming and intentional anti-racist in their practices.
4. *Political context* – This dimension incorporates the historical, cultural, and political contexts in which the institution and leader operate and recognizes that competing values, ideologies, and perspectives may exist. The leader must understand and be strategic about the political climate at the federal, state, local and individual campus level to be successful.

Each of these areas influences the distinct perspective and behavior of the leader as well as their influence on each other. For instance, if a leader was a first-generation college student when they went through college, their experiences may affect their own perceptions of first-generation college students.

Both CRSL and culturally relevant leadership frameworks are rooted in CRT. Both frameworks have been applied to K-12 but not to higher education.

Culturally Responsive Mid-Level Leadership in Higher Education

California Community Colleges are a diverse setting, consisting of multicultural students as well as employees. The need for leaders to be more conscious and aware of the cultural dynamic of those they are leading is beginning to emerge in the literature (Brinegar, 2019; Hollowell, 2019). It is also clear that there is a need to investigate mid-level leadership at colleges and universities, as evidenced by the work of Brunson (2020). However, there appears to be an emerging need to better understand how mid-level leaders at higher education institutions are leading using culturally responsive pedagogies.

Research Problem

The need to better understand how mid-level leaders at higher education institutions are leading using culturally responsive pedagogies can be identified through trends in literature. Four key trends have been identified to point to a need for a better understanding of how mid-level leaders at higher education institutions are leading using culturally responsive pedagogy.

First, culturally responsive leadership research is beginning to emerge in K-12 education, as evidenced by the work of Brinegar (2020) and Hollowell (2019). These two studies, although important to the topic of culturally responsive leadership, were done in the context of K-12 education. The trend in K-12 arguably points to a need for further investigation in other educational contexts such as higher education.

Second, Brunson (2020) examined the leadership development of higher education mid-level leaders. Brunson found that mid-level leaders from marginalized populations often reported that they did not have access to mentoring and leadership development like their dominant culture counterparts. Furthermore, Brunson reported mid-level leaders wanting more opportunities to connect with similar communities of practice and for ongoing leadership development. However, although Brunson's study focused on mid-level leadership development, it did not investigate the specific topic of culturally responsive mid-level leadership practices.

Third, Khalifa et al. (2016) synthesized the literature on cultural responsiveness and developed the CRSL framework. The CRSL framework has the following four dimensions: (a) critical self-reflection on leadership behaviors, (b) the development of culturally responsive teachers, (c) promoting a culturally responsive and inclusive school, and (d) engaging with students, parents, and indigenous contexts.

Fourth, Horsford et al. (2011) synthesized the literature on culturally responsive leadership and developed the culturally relevant leadership framework. The mediating factors identified by Horsford et al. for culturally relevant leadership were: (a) personal journey, (b) professional duty, (c) pedagogical approach, and (d) political context. Nevertheless, the trend in the literature points to a need for further investigation into the application of culturally responsive leadership frameworks. Although CRSL and culturally relevant leadership are two of the most current frameworks on culturally responsive leadership, no studies to date have been found on how such frameworks would be utilized in a higher education setting.

Last, Cervantes (2015) made the case that strong transformational leadership that is focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion is necessary at the California Community Colleges to address the gaps in achievement through his case study of Destino College. The name of Destino College is a pseudonym given by the students to the college that predominantly served Latino students. Cervantes further found that transformational leaders who promote diversity and equity possess the traits of high "level of self-awareness, coped with vulnerability, and engaged in self-reflection" (p. 169). Cervantes's finding that transformational leaders need to be champions of diversity and equity parallels the literature on culturally responsive leadership. As such, Cervantes's finding on leaders being champions for diversity and equity bridges two leadership styles, thus pointing a need to further investigate trends in literature related to culturally responsive leadership.

It should be noted that community college leadership at all levels strongly influences school culture, policies, and student success. Brunson (2020) described the important and essential role of mid-level leaders. In the area of culturally responsive leadership, recent work has been done by Khalifa et al. (2016), Horsford et al. (2011), Hollowell (2019), and Cervantes (2015). However, there appears to be a trend leading to a need to investigate the intersectionality of higher education and culturally responsive leadership: specifically, the need to understand how middle level student services leaders utilize culturally responsive leadership practices.

Purpose

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to identify and describe how mid-level California Community College Student Services leaders are culturally responsive in

their leadership strategies, based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework.

Research Question

How are mid-level California Community College Student Services leaders culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework?

Research Sub-Questions

Based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework:

1. How does one's sense of professional duty influence mid-level California Community College Student Services leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
2. How does one's personal journey influence mid-level California Community College Student Services leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
3. How does one's pedagogical approach influence mid-level California Community College Student Services leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
4. How do political contexts influence mid-level California Community College Student Services leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

Significance of the Study

This study examined the lived experiences of community college mid-level Student Services leaders and their utilization of culturally responsive practices in creating

an inclusive environment for the diverse students, staff, and communities that they serve. This study is significant in the following three ways.

First this study built upon the work of Hollowell (2019) and Santamaría and Santamaría (2016) on utilizing cultural responsiveness within education. It will add to the body of research and expand the understanding of the application to higher education leaders specifically Student Services leaders. Hollowell's findings focused on culturally responsive leadership practices in the K-12 setting. Findings from this study will extend the scope of culturally responsive leadership into the higher education arena. Additionally, Santamaría and Santamaría's research is a seminal work related to this study. They concentrated on culturally responsive leadership practices within community colleges, but not specifically on mid-level leaders like student service directors or deans. Findings from this study will extend the work of Santamaría and Santamaría because it will offer deeper insight into the specific practices of mid-level leaders in the area of culturally responsive leadership.

Secondly, this study is significant because it builds on the work of Kolati (1993) and Moore and Shulock (2007). These two studies focused on the vastly diverse student population of community colleges. This study investigated culturally responsive leadership practices of mid-level leaders in student service departments in California Community Colleges. Findings from this study will shed light on how mid-level leaders can utilize culturally responsive leadership skills when leading the diverse student population that Kolati and Moore and Shulock described.

Thirdly, this study is notable because it aligns with the equity goals of within the California Community College Chancellor's Office's (2020b) *Vision for Success:*

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion report. This report outlines specific and targeted goals to achieve the equity goals of hiring faculty and staff members who are more reflective of student demographics. Findings from this study may shed light on strategies to create an inclusive culturally responsive community of practice to recruit and retain diverse staff and faculty, which can likely be used immediately by mid-level leaders in higher education.

Definitions

The operational and theoretical definitions used in the study are as follows:

Anti-Racism: Actively identifying and challenging policies, behaviors, and beliefs that perpetuate racist inequities, actions, and ideas. Further, anti-racist ideas suggest that "racial groups are equals in all their apparent differences—that there is nothing right or wrong with any racial group," and that antiracist policies lead to racial equity (Kendi, 2019, p. 20)

Bias: An inclination, feeling, preference, or opinion, about a social group that is preconceived or unreasoned and grounded in stereotypes and prejudices.

BIPOC: An abbreviation for Black, Indigenous, People of Color.

California Community Colleges: A 2-year post-secondary education system, also known as "junior colleges." The California Community Colleges are the largest statewide public education system and the largest system of higher education in the United States, with 116 colleges and more than 2.1 million students (CCCCO, 2020b).

Color blindness: This racial ideology promotes the notion that all individuals be treated equally without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity. This approach negates the impact that race and/or ethnicity has had on the lived experiences or identities of

individuals and can result in perpetuating institutional or systemic racism (CCCCO, 2020a).

Community College: "Community colleges in America, originally termed junior colleges or two-year colleges, have their roots dating back to the Morrill Act of 1862 (the Land Grant Act), which essentially expanded access into public higher education" (Drury, 2003, p.3).

Critical Race Theory (CRT): An academic and legal framework developed by activists and legal scholars in the 1970s who challenged the ways in which race and racial power are represented in American society. CRT asserts that racism permeates all parts of American society. It is based on the premise that race is a social construct, not natural 19 or biological ones, and is inherent in legal systems and policies designed to create and maintain political, social, and economic inequalities between Whites and people of color (Bell et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Culturally Responsive Leadership: A theory and leadership practice that considers race, ethnicity, language, culture, and gender (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016). Characteristics of culturally responsive leaders can include self-awareness, creating inclusive environments, courage to have critical conversations, intersectionality, and operating through a CRT lens.

Culture (institutional, ethnic): Values, beliefs, attitudes, traditions, customs, behavioral norms, language, and collective identities shared by a group of individuals and serve as a pattern for interpreting reality (CCCCO, 2020a; Howard, 2019).

Deficit Minded: Blaming students for their inequitable outcomes instead of examining the systemic factors that contribute to their challenges. Places the

responsibility for failure on the student rather than the systemic factors that contribute to these outcomes. Has traditionally been used to describe marginalized student groups (Cabrera, 2018; CCCCO, 2020a).

Diversity: The ways in which people differ, including all the characteristics that make one individual or group different from another—such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, physical appearance, as well as different ideas, perspectives, and values (UC Berkeley, Division of Equity & Inclusion, 2009).

EOPS Leader: For the purpose of this study, an EOPS leader is a mid-level student services leader including but not limited to Dean, Director, Assistant Director, Manager, Supervisor, Lead or Coordinator who manages or leads the institution's extended opportunity program and services (EOPS) program.

Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS): An abbreviation for the Extended Opportunity Program and Services, a state-funded program established into law in 1969 throughout the California Community Colleges to grant students marginalized by economic, educational, or language barriers, with an array of support services aimed to help them achieve their educational goals (certificate, degree, or transfer to a 4-year institution; Crawford, 1999).

Equity: Conditions under which individuals are given the resources they need to have access to the same opportunities as the general population. Equity accounts for systematic inequalities, meaning the distribution of resources provides more for those who need it most. "Equality" assumes even distribution (CCCCO, 2020a).

Financial Aid Leader: For the purpose of this study, a financial aid leader is a mid-level student services leader including but not limited to Dean, Director, Assistant Director, Manager, Supervisor, Lead, or Coordinator who manages or leads the institution's financial aid office.

First-Generation College Student (FGCS): College students whose parents do not have more than a high school education (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Gender Identity: Refers to an internal, and personally defined, sense of being a man, woman, both, in between, or non-binary (CCCCO, 2020a).

Higher Education: Education beyond high school, traditionally grades nine to 12 in the U.S. Also known as higher ed or HE or post-secondary education.

Hispanic or Latino/a: Panethnic labels, often used interchangeably, for people of Spanish or Latin American descent (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

Horsford, Grosland, and Gunn's Four Domains of Culturally Relevant Leadership: Professional duty, personal journey, pedagogical approach, and political context (Horsford et al., 2011).

Professional Duty: Characterized by a sense of obligation to lead for equity, engagement, and excellence.

Personal Journey: A commitment to cultural proficiency gained through self-reflection, life experiences, and the intersection of multiple personal identities.

Pedagogical Approach: The pedagogical strategies utilized to build a culturally relevant and antiracist school culture.

Political Context: Incorporates the historical, cultural, and political contexts in which the institution and leader operate and recognizes that competing values, ideologies, and perspectives may exist.

Inclusion: "Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policymaking in a way that shares power" (CCCCO, 2020, p. 6)

Institutional Racism: The ways in which systems of power, institutional structures, policies, and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional policies may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for Whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as people of color (University of Washington Department of Epidemiology Equity, 2019). Can also be referred to as systemic racism.

Intersectionality: How race, ethnicity, gender, class, and other characteristics converge and overlap (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality allows researchers, leaders and educators to critically examine how multiple identities can uniquely impact lived experiences, inequalities, and power (Barnet & Felten, 2016).

Latina/o or Latinx: Although the U.S. Census Bureau tallies Latinos or Hispanics under one umbrella term, it is meant to capture all individuals who identify with the following ethnicities, regardless of race: Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican Republic, Costa Rican, Guatemalan, Honduran, Nicaraguan, Panamanian, Salvadoran, Other Central American, Argentinian, Bolivian, Chilean, Colombian, Ecuadorian, Paraguayan, Peruvian, Uruguayan, Venezuelan, Other South American, or all other Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

Leadership: "A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2010, p. 3).

Marginalized: Individuals, groups, and communities (including but not limited to those grouped by ethnicity, sexual identity, socioeconomic status, gender, and age) that have historically and systematically been denied access to services, resources, and power relationships across economic, political, and cultural dimensions as a result of systemic, durable, and persistent racism, discrimination, and other forms of oppression (CCCCO, 2020; Sevelius et al., 2020). In different contexts, also referred to as underrepresented or underserved

Mid-level Leader: In the context of higher education, mid-level leaders can be found among faculty, staff, and administrator ranks. Although position titles are not consistent across campuses, common titles may include but not limited to director, dean, manager, supervisor, lead, coordinator, or chair (Amey, Mitchell, Rosales, & Giardello, 2020).

Minoritized: Describes the process of "minortization" whereby individuals are afforded less power and representation based on their social identities. These social identities, such as race and ethnicity, are socially constructed concepts that are created and accepted by society (CCCCO, 2020a).

Pedagogy: The practice of educating, or instructing, or teaching; the activities that impart knowledge or skill.

Racial Microaggressions: Within the context of higher education, racial microaggressions are subtle and often-times unconscious, yet commonplace acts of racism. These acts may take form verbally, nonverbally, and/or visually, yet all have a

negative impact on campus climate and the well-being of the individual target (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Racially Minoritized: Process by which groups of students or individuals are "othered" and thereby disenfranchised based on race by the dominant group (Benitez, 2010; Stewart, 2013).

Senior-Level Leader: For the purpose of this study, senior-level leaders work at the campus level and hold the role of president, superintendent/president, executive vice president, vice president. Senior-level leaders at the district level include, but are not limited to, chancellor and vice chancellor.

Student Services: Divisions or departments such as financial aid, counseling, admissions, EOPS, library, food pantry, etc., that provide services and student support in higher education. Its purpose is to support student growth, development, academic success, wellness, and referral to college and community resources during the academic experience.

URM: An abbreviation for underrepresented minority.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the parameters of the study that are controlled by the researcher (Patton, 2012). This research study is bound by (a) the number of California Community Colleges, (b) the number of mid-level leaders such as Dean and Directors within Student Services of those colleges, and (c) the culturally relevant leadership framework for leaders.

This research study is delimited to the 116 California Community Colleges. In addition, this study is delimited to mid-level leaders within Student Services divisions in

California Community Colleges. The utilization and application of the culturally relevant leadership framework for leaders is another delimitation.

Organization of the Study

There are five chapters in this research study. Chapter I provided an introduction and background of California Community Colleges, Student Services leadership, and cultural responsiveness. Chapter I also includes the purpose, research questions, significance of the study, and delimitations. Chapter II provides a history of California Community Colleges, recent equity-minded initiatives, and a review of literature on cultural responsiveness and mid-level Student Service leadership within California Community Colleges. Chapter II also contains the theoretical frameworks of cultural responsiveness and the conceptual framework utilized in this study. Chapter III explains the methodology of this research study. This chapter also includes the research design, participant selection, population, sample, and data gathering procedures utilized. The study's findings are presented and analyzed in Chapter IV. In Chapter V, the major conclusions and future research recommendations are presented.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter II of this research study provides a review of literature of mid-level Student Services leaders through the lens of the culturally responsive practices. Chapter II begins with a review of the history of higher education in California, including the California Master Plan for Higher Education and the University of California, California State University, and California Community College systems. The next section discusses the structure within California Community Colleges followed by the leadership structure of California Community Colleges. The next section examines the diverse student demographics within the California Community Colleges followed by a discussion of student completion and retention rates. Immediately following that is a section on major equity-minded initiatives within the California Community Colleges. The next section discusses the role of student services in advancing equity, the leadership structure of student services, and the critical role of mid-level leaders within student services. The final sections of this chapter cover the study's theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

Higher Education in California

There are three distinct public higher education entities in California: University of California, California State University, and California Community Colleges. The Public Policy Institute of California (H. Johnson & Mejia, 2019) reported that the three public higher education systems in California collectively serve about 3 million students a year. A critical component of the modern public education system was the Master Plan for Higher Education in California.

California Master Plan for Higher Education

In 1960, a study team was commissioned by the Regents of the University of California and the State Board of Education to develop the California Master Plan for Higher Education. During this time, junior colleges, which would be later called community colleges, were governed by the California State Board of Education. The goal of the California Master Plan for Higher Education was to develop a coherent system of public higher education with defined roles focused on academic excellence and access for all. Prior to this plan, the University of California system and the State Colleges of California (which later became the California State University system) worked independently of each other. As a result of the California Master Plan for Higher Education, higher education was organized in a framework that encouraged each of the three components to focus on creating excellence within their own sphere of responsibility.

The California Master Plan for Higher Education (University of California Office of the President, 2007) differentiated the primary roles for each of the three segments of higher public education. In addition to being designated as the primary research system, The University of California system was given the function to provide undergraduate, graduate, and professional education, such as instruction in law and medicine. The University of California was also given the exclusive authority over the issuance of doctoral degrees. The California State University system was given the primary mission of undergraduate education and graduate education, including professional teacher preparation. Faculty within the California State University system are allowed to conduct research as long as it aligns with the primary function of instruction. The California

Community Colleges were given the primary function of vocational instruction and lower division undergraduate education which is generally first 2 years of a 4-year degree. Graduates from community colleges would be guaranteed transfer admission into the CSU and UC systems.

The California Master Plan for Higher Education authorized California Community Colleges to provide remedial instruction, adult noncredit courses, English as a second language (ESL) courses, and workforce training. Additionally, the California Master Plan for Higher Education mandated that the top 12.5% of graduating high school seniors are guaranteed admission to the University of California system, the top 33.3% of graduating high seniors are guaranteed admission to the California State University system, and community colleges serve any adult that is able to benefit from higher education (University of California Office of the President, 2007).

Furthermore, the California Master Plan for Higher Education decreed that all California residents would be able to access higher education tuition free. Under the Master Plan, students can be charged for supplementary costs such as dormitories and recreational facilities. However, the State of California faced severe budget issues after the enacting of Proposition 13, which limited the amount of property tax that can be collected, essentially eliminating free public higher education. Per unit enrollment fees were enacted to make up for the reduced property taxes collected.

The major elements of the California Master Plan for Higher Education were enacted into legislation through the Donahoe Higher Education Act in 1960 (University of California Office of the President, 2007). There have been some updates to the California Master Plan for Higher Education since the original enactment, but the major

elements are still intact. Each of the segments on higher education in California predates the Master Plan and each has their own history.

University of California

In 1849, the State Constitution for California passed; this document contained provisions to public education. To capitalize on the Morrill Land Grants Act, the California legislature established the Agricultural, Mining, and Mechanical Arts College in 1866 (Online Archive of California, n.d). However, this college was only created on paper and was a placeholder for a future college. In 1853, Henry Durant established the private college of Contra Costa Academy, a liberal arts college. In 1855, the trustees of Contra Costa Academy were given permission for a College of California to be established in the current city of Berkeley (Online Archive of California, n.d.). The trustees purchased land, created college buildings, and had faculty to teach. However, the enrollment was very low and soon the college faced a fiscal crisis (Online Archive of California, n.d).

Then it was proposed that the College of California, along with its assets of faculty and students, be merged with the Agricultural, Mining, and Mechanical Arts College, which had money. In March 1868, the passing of the Organic Act established the University of California (Online Archive of California, n.d). The Organic Act also allowed the Board of Regents to establish affiliates to the University of California with self-sustaining independent colleges. In 1869, the first University of California opened its doors with 38 students (Online Archive of California, n.d).

Currently the University of California has 10 campuses, of which nine serve undergraduate and graduate students. University of California, San Francisco is the only

University of Campus that does not enroll any undergraduate students because it is solely offers graduate and professional degrees. The University of California serves over 280,000 students a year and has over 227,000 faculty and staff members (University of California, n.d.). Based on 2022 enrollments, the University of California serves a diverse student population, with the following demographic representation: 32% Asians, 23% Latino/a, 22% White and 5% African Americans (University of California, n.d.). Fall entering freshman for the cohorts of 2016, 2017, and 2018 have a graduation rate of 73% within 4 years and 86% within 6 years (University of California, 2017). The graduate rate for transfer students is 60% within 2 years and nearly 90% within 4 years (University of California, 2017).

California State University

In 1849, the State Constitution for California passed and contained provisions in regard to education. One provision created the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the other established a state university. The Weekly Normal School was established in 1857, providing training for students seeking to be school teachers. It was renamed the California State Normal School in 1862. More State Normal Schools were established across the state over the next 50 years. In 1921, Normal Schools became Teachers Colleges. In 1923, the Teachers Colleges were authorized to issue Bachelor of Arts Degrees in Education. By 1955, the Teachers Colleges began issuing Master of Art and Master of Science degrees.

Following the recommendations of the Master Plan for Higher Education for California, the Donahoe Higher Education Act established the California State Colleges with a Board of Trustees and a Chancellor in 1861. The California State Colleges, which

later became the California State University system, still serve their main mission of undergraduate education and graduate education including teacher preparation. In 2006 with the passage of Senate Bill 724, the California State University was authorized to grant the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership. Other doctorate degrees can be granted in partnership with a University of California or a private institution.

Today, the California State University has 23 campuses across California. The California State University is the largest public university system in the United States. It serves approximately 486,000 students a year with approximately 56,000 faculty and staff members. The California State University serves diverse populations, with the Fall 2020 demographics as follows: 45% Hispanic/Latinx, 22% White, 16% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 4% African American. The graduation rates of first-time, full-time freshman students who began at a CSU in fall 2016 was 31% after 4 years (Jackson, 2020). Students who transferred from California Community Colleges to the CSU had a fall 2018 graduation rate of 43.6% after 2 years (California State University, 2021).

California Community Colleges

California was the first state in the United States to legislate the creation of junior colleges with the passage of the Upward Extension Law in 1907. Under this legislation, high school districts were required to establish junior colleges, which are now referred to as community colleges. The goal of the junior colleges was to provide postsecondary courses similar to the first 2 years at a university. In 1910, the Collegiate Department of Fresno School, which later became Fresno City College, opened its doors. It was one of only three junior colleges in the United States.

Community colleges, also known as junior colleges, were then expanded further with the passing of the Ballard Junior College Act in 1917. This legislation provided greater state and county support for junior colleges and expanded the mission to include trade studies. In 1921, with the passage of District Junior College Law, elected governing boards were established for the colleges. In the same year, Modesto Junior College became the first ever community college district. In 1922, the very first community college transfer student transferred from Modesto Junior College to Stanford University. Even with the Great Depression in full swing in 1930, California led the country with 15,000 students in 34 junior colleges. By 1947, California Junior Colleges had grown to 55 campuses and served over 60,000 students. By 1958, more than 40% of all students enrolled in junior colleges were enrolled in California institutions.

With the issuance of the California Master Plan for Education in 1960, junior colleges were expected to remain open admissions institutions unlike the University of California and the California State University. With the passage of Assembly Bill 2804 in 1961, junior colleges founded within a K-12 system has to form their own independent community college district. In 1967, community colleges were removed from the supervision of the State Department of Education to the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges and the State Chancellor's Office.

To have a deeper understanding of the function of California Community Colleges, it is essential to understand their structure.

Leading the Diverse Landscape of California Community Colleges

The Board of Governors is tasked with oversight of the California Community Colleges. The California Community College Chancellor's Office serves as the

administrative branch that implements the Board of Governors regulations and legislation and provides guidance to all the community colleges within the system. The Governor appoints members to the Board of Governors. Additionally, a local Board of Trustees governs each of the community college districts. The board trustees are elected positions. There are 73 community college districts in California, with some being a single college district and others being multi-college districts. Each community college district has a superintendent or chancellor.

Each college has a president who serves as the leader of the campus. In a single college district, then the superintendent often serves as the president of the college as well. In most of the colleges, there are two divisions of Student Services and Instruction. Often, each division is led is by a vice president. The Vice President of Student Services is generally designated as the chief student services officer of the campus. The Vice President of Instruction is generally designated as the chief instructional officer of the campus. Each of the Vice Presidents reports to the President. Under each of the vice presidents, multiple deans often report to them. The Vice President of Student Services serves as the executive leader for the division.

Before examining in-depth the structure and role of Student Services, it is essential to understand the student demographics of California Community Colleges and initiatives that have already been undertaken to address the gaps in retention and completion among students of color.

Diverse Student Demographics of California Community Colleges

According to Moore and Shulock (2007), the student population of the California Community Colleges is quickly becoming more diverse. According to the California

Community College Chancellor's Office Data Mart (2010), from 1992-2010 the numbers of students of color increased drastically at California colleges, but the number of White students decreased. This trend is expected to continue as United States Census Bureau predicts that by 2060 (Vespa, Medina, & Armstrong, 2020):

- The White population in the United States will decrease from 190 million to 179 million.
- Approximately one third of the children population will be non-Hispanic White compared to half of the older adult population.
- The foreign-born parent population will rise from 49 million to 69 million.

Currently, approximately 69% of the students attending California Community Colleges are students of color (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2020). The diverse student demographics of the California Community Colleges roughly match the diversity of California.

According to the California Community College Vision for Success Report, 60% of California undergraduate students attend a community college, which is 14% more than the national average. Based upon the 2019 Student Success Scoreboard (2019), which reflects 2017-2018 student data, approximately 40% of the students attending California Community Colleges are first-generation college students, meaning that parents have a high school diploma or less education (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2021). The 2019 Student Success Scoreboard data makes it clear that the California Community Colleges have made significant gains in ensuring access to higher education for diverse populations, but retention and completion rates continue to lag.

California Community College Student Retention and Completion

From their inception, California Community Colleges were created to be open institutions that were an avenue to pursuing higher education with the burden of persistence and completion being placed mainly on the student. Although the California Community Colleges has created greater access to higher education, especially for first-generation low-income students of color, there remain major gaps in persistence and completion. As adult learners, the responsibility for learning is primarily placed on the student, whereas the instructor is responsible for delivery of the instruction. Students are responsible for accessing appropriate resources that are available to support them. Students often seek support and guidance through Student Services for academic and personal struggles.

In the last two decades, there has been a greater system wide push for California Community Colleges to establish and report key student success metrics. These are widely published and available to the public. In 2011, the California Community College Chancellor's Office Student Success Task Force—which included faculty, administrators, and other key stakeholders of the California Community Colleges—published the following concerning data on student progress and completion (California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force, 2012):

- Among students seeking a degree, only 53.6 percent earn a certificate, degree, or transfer preparation; for African-American students, the figure is 42 percent and for Latino students, it's 43 percent.

- Students who enter California community college with one math level below transfer level only 46.2 percent complete a certificates, degrees, or transfer preparation.
- Students who enter four levels below transfer level in Math, only 25.5 percent ever achieve those outcomes.
- Of California community college students who seek to transfer to a four-year institution, only 41 percent are successful. For African Americans, it is significantly lower at 34 percent and for Latinos it is at 31 percent. (p. 4)

The Student Success Task Force (2011) made recommendations to improve student outcomes and emphasized a greater focus on student success without losing emphasis on access. Furthermore, the Student Success Task Force highly recommended the establishment of statewide and college-level performance goals that are disaggregated by race and ethnicity. This would allow the system as well as lawmakers to measure the impacts of policy changes aimed at closing the gaps in educational attainment especially among historically underrepresented populations. Since this report, there have been a number of legislative and California Community College Chancellor's Office initiatives that have been implemented to begin to address the equity gaps and increase student success.

Equity-Minded Initiatives

A number of key equity-minded initiatives have been launched over the last decade to increase student progress, retention, and completion.

Student Success Act of 2012

The Student Success Act of 2012 launched the Student Success and Support Program, which repurposed essential matriculation of students through required core services such as assessment and counseling services to develop student educational plans. Additionally, colleges within the California Community College system were required to develop a process to identify at risk students and implement interventions. Generally, all the core services are provided under the division of Student Services. The goal of this legislation was to increase student access, progress, and completion through intense and required services at the beginning of and following up throughout a student's educational journey. An essential component of this legislation was to ensure that students made informed decisions on the program of study, thus the major emphasis on the student educational plan. Through the student's comprehensive educational plan, the student had a clear map of what courses they needed to complete, essential deadlines, etc.

The California Community College Chancellor's Office required colleges to submit plans describing how funds would be utilized, core services provided, and the identification of student at risk for academic or progress as well as the interventions implemented. Targeted funding was tied to the delivery of the core services. Additionally, colleges were required to align institutional research to measure the effectiveness of this student success program through the lens of student equity. College data on student success and progress toward progress and completions rates including those of historically underrepresented populations were available to stakeholders.

Senate Bill 860

With the passage of the Senate Bill 860 in 2014, colleges were required to submit yearly equity plans that specifically outlined how they are addressing the achievement gaps of their historically underrepresented populations, their progress toward those goals, and any new projects or initiatives launched to further address the gaps. In 2018, Student Equity, Student Success and Support Program, and Basic Skills Initiative were combined to form the Student Equity and Achievement Program.

Assembly Bill 705

A part of the matriculation process for new community college students included an assessment to determine placement in math and English courses. This was a common a practice across the nation. Scott-Clayton (2012) found that commonly used placement exams are not predicative of student success in particular courses and often under-place students. The Public Policy Institute of California found that a vast majority of the quarter million students who register for courses at California Community Colleges were placed in remedial non-transferrable math and English courses, with a majority never completing transfer level courses in math and English (Cuellar-Mejia, Rodriquez, & Johnson, 2018). Students of color were disproportionately affected by these practices. Cuellar-Mejia, Rodrigues, & Johnson (2016) found that 87% of both Latino and African American students enroll in developmental courses which do not count toward a degree, compared to 70% of Asian American and 74% of White students. Cuellar-Mejia et al. (2016) further found that approximately 86% of low-income students enroll in developmental courses. There are multiple issues at play that may explain the under-placement of students, such as timing of the test, varying cut scores, opportunities for

practice prior to the exam, understanding the ramifications of the results, etc. However, the research is very clear that utilizing placement exams by themselves for placement does not accurately place students in the math and/or English class in which they are most likely to succeed.

California Governor Jerry Brown signed Assembly Bill 705 into law in October 2017. This bill required that "community college district or college to maximize the probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and math" within a year (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2023, What is AB 705 section). AB 705 brought forth sweeping changes to the California Community Colleges in terms of student placement. Starting in Fall 2019, California Community Colleges were prohibited from using placement tests to determine placement and furthermore students had to be given an opportunity to complete transfer level courses within 1 year, thereby nearly eliminating all developmental or non-college level English and math courses. Self-reported high school grades and grade point average are the primary tool used for placement under this legislation (Achterman, 2019). Many of the California Community Colleges are offering some form of additional academic support to students who are identified as likely to struggle in transfer level courses based on their high school data.

Student Services has played a key role in the implementation of AB 705. Working collaboratively with instructional faculty and administration, Student Services often leads implementation of AB 705 to the student level. Early results of this legislation are showing increases in access and completion of transfer level English and math courses, especially among underrepresented groups (Cuellar-Mejia et al., 2020).

Vision for Success

In 2017, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office launched Vision for Success, which outlined specific, targeted, and ambitious goals for the entire California Community Colleges (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2017). Vision for Success sought to increase student success and narrow the achievement gap for students of color. The goals were amended slightly in 2019. The goals outlined in Vision for Success (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2019) to be achieved by 2022 are:

- Increase by at least 20 percent the number of CCC students annually who acquire associates degrees, credentials, certificates, or specific skill sets that prepare them for an in-demand job.
- Increase by 35 percent the number of CCC students transferring annually to a UC or CSU.
- Decrease the average number of units accumulated by California Community College students earning associates degrees, from approximately 87 total units (the most recent system-wide average) to 79 total units.
- Increase the percent of exiting CTE students who report being employed in their field of study, from the most recent statewide average of 60 percent to an improved rate of 69 percent.
- Reduce equity gaps across the above measures through faster improvements among traditionally underrepresented student groups, with the goal of cutting achievement gaps by 40 percent within 5 years and fully closing those achievement gaps within 10 years.

- Reduce regional achievement gaps across the above measures through faster improvements among colleges located in regions with the lowest educational attainment of adults, with the goal of fully closing regional achievement gaps within 10 years.

To maintain focus on these goals system wide, districts and colleges are expected to adopt the same goals or create similar goals that align with Vision for Success. Through this greater focus on clear and consistent set of goals system wide, the California Community Colleges are hoping to make sizeable gains in student progress, retention, and completion.

Guided Pathways

Whereas the previously mentioned equity initiatives and legislation aimed to close the achievement gap through targeted measures, the Guided Pathways framework provides a model for the colleges to examine their systemic and daily practices to support students from enrollment to completion to address barriers and increase access, retention, and completion. The Guided Pathways framework delves deep into the policies, procedures, processes, and actual delivery of services, including accountability to measure changes resulting from established initiatives (Rassen, Chaplot, Jenkins, & Johnstone, 2013). Student Services plays a key role in the delivery of services to increase access, retention, and completion within the Guided Pathways framework.

There are four key focuses within the Guided Pathways framework: connection, entry, progress, and completion (Baston, 2018). The first phase of entry explores the students' experience from recruitment to application. The second phase of entry looks at enrollment in and completion of identified key courses. Baston (2018) describes progress

as “entry into the program of study through completion of 75% of the requirements” (p. 814). The fourth phase of completion covers completion of the program of study, which can be a certificate, degree, or transfer requirements being met. As the student navigates through these four phases, they have interactions with college personnel, college systems, processes, and structures. The student experience is essentially the culmination of those interactions, which causes the student to either push forward or lose momentum in their academic progress (Rassen et al., 2018).

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Task Force

In 2018, the Board of Governors established the Vision for Success Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Taskforce (California Community Colleges, 2020). This taskforce consisted of leadership from the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, leadership from the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, representatives from the community college district trustees, and select college presidents/chief executive officers, human resources managers, students, faculty and staff. The goal of the DEI Taskforce was to review the ethnic and racial diversity of faculty and staff in comparison to students within the California Community Colleges and to examine the role this may play in student success. The two questions they investigated were:

> If faculty and staff are a main lever in student achievement, how then is achievement impacted when faculty and staff are unlike the students they serve? What does it take to create an inclusive environment where all students are equitably served? (California Community College, 2020, p. 12)

The DEI Task Force found that the racial and ethnic diversity of the California Community College faculty and staff continues to be significantly lower than that of the student population (California Community Colleges, 2020). Furthermore, a literature review conducted by the Success Center for California Community Colleges at the Foundation for California Community Colleges to support the work of this task force obtained the following findings (Success Center of California Community Colleges, 2019):

1. Diversity increases student achievement. Diversity of staff and faculty is a critical component of increasing student success. Decreasing the racial and ethnic gaps of the faculty and staff in comparison to the students they serve enhances student outcomes.
2. Diversity influences student and employee retention. After examining the practices in hiring of successful companies, it is evident that diversity increases innovation and retention.
3. Faculty and staff diversity reduces the likelihood of implicit bias. Both White students and students of color report faculty being discriminatory among students, but students of color experience more active prejudice (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Although most faculty recognize the importance of teaching social justice, many are unprepared to address social justice issues due to lack of training or knowledge (Brown, 2004). Having a diverse faculty and staff that represents the student demographics demonstrates the institution's commitment to diversity.
4. Faculty and staff diversity increases the ability to integrate multicultural and culturally responsive pedagogy into teaching practices. According to Quaye and

Harper (2007), "learning and engagement are inextricably bound, and students from all racial and ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be engaged when faculty expose them to multicultural perspectives" (p. 34). Having diverse staff and faculty allows diverse voices to be raised and heard.

Furthermore, Parnell (2016) found that student affairs staff often carried the weight of pushing forward and engaging in discussion about race and ethnic diversity. The departments within student affairs (also called student services) serve as the front lines in giving students a place to communicate and engage in discussion of race and ethnic diversity. Therefore, it is essential for institutional leadership and key stakeholders to understand the structure and role of student services in serving students in this area to engage the rest of the campus in the mission for DEI.

Role of Student Services in Advancing Equity

Fundamental to the mission of the California Community College system to advance student access and success is to ensure that assistance and support is provided throughout a student's journey; Student Services is a key division in achieving this goal. Some of the departments that are often housed in Student Services include financial aid, counseling, Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS), and admissions and records. Often, the most marginalized students are served through specific programs designed to provide targeted support. Here are some of the major categorical programs that provide targeted support for marginalized students.

Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS)

According to the California Community Colleges Extended Opportunity Programs and Services Association, EOPS was established in 1969 and has the mission to "encourage the enrollment, retention and transfer of students handicapped by language, social, economic and educational disadvantages, and to facilitate the successful completion of their goals and objectives in college" (CCCEOPSA, 2022, Our Mission section). Students who are accepted into EOPS are often low-income first-generation students coming from a marginalized population. EOPS offers academic, counseling services, financial resources and other support services that go above and beyond the traditional services offered to the general population on California college campuses.

Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE)

Students who qualify for EOPS and are single parents on public assistance can receive additional support through the CARE Program (CCCEOPSA, 2022). Through the CARE Program, students may receive additional financial and resources support such as transportation vouchers, childcare referrals, etc.

Next Up

The NextUp Program provides current and former foster youth who are current community college students with support and services which can include assistance with textbooks, school supplies, transportation, tutoring, food, etc.

California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs)

Through the California Community Colleges CalWORKs program, current students currently on public assistance can receive services such as work study, job placement, childcare, skills training, etc. through this program (CCCCO, 2022). The goal

of this program is to help students on public assistance achieve more long-term self-sufficiency.

Disabled Students Programs and Services

Students with a verified disability can qualify for the Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS). Students with verified physical disabilities, learning disabilities, psychological disabilities, developmental delays, brain injuries, visual impairments, health problems, and hearing impairments can qualify for services through DSPS. Through DSPS, students can receive services such as specialized counseling, mobility assistance, specialized tutoring, transcription services, interpreter services for hearing impaired or deaf students, etc. (CCCCO, 2022).

Student Equity and Achievement Program (SEAP)

The Student Equity and Achievement Program (SEAP) combines three programs under one umbrella. The goal is to integrate the efforts into one single program in order to increase overall student success and close the achievement gaps for students from traditionally underrepresented populations. One of the programs merged under SEAP is the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP), which is targeted to fully implement core services: orientation; assessment; counseling, advising, and other education planning services needed to assist a student in making an informed decision about his or her education goal and course of study and to develop an education plan; and follow up for at-risk students. A second program integrated into SEAP is Basic Skills and ESL. The goal of this program is to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of resources to support academically underprepared and underserved students (CCCO, 2022). The third program under SEAP is Student Equity. Through Student Equity, colleges are required to

develop detailed goals and take measures to address disparities of achievement among disproportionately impacted populations.

TRIO Programs

TRIO Programs encompass eight federally funded outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). The most common TRIO Programs at California Community Colleges are:

- Upward Bound – This program targets high school students from low-income families and high school students from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree. The goal of this program is to increase the number of students who complete secondary education, enroll in, and complete postsecondary education (U.S Department of Education, 2022).
- Student Support Services – This program provides additional support to disadvantaged students, including those who are the first in their families to attend college, are low income, or have disabilities. Students in this program can receive individualized counseling that is focused on personal, career, and academic information, as well as tutoring and mentoring.
- Talent Search – This program targets high school students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential to be successful in post-secondary education. This program supports potential college students by providing academic, career, and financial counseling and encourages them to graduate from high school and continue on to and complete their postsecondary education.

Veterans Services

Through Veterans Services, support is provided to veterans who are transitioning from active military service to civilian life. This transition can be difficult especially for veterans who have had combat deployment. Through this program, veterans receive specialized counseling, community building, and targeted support.

Puente and Umoja

Programs such as Puente and Umoja target historically marginalized populations by providing additional support, access, community building, and advocacy. In addition through Puente, Latino and other multicultural texts are incorporated into the cohort English courses. In the Umoja Program, the historical African American experience is discussed through history, ethnic studies, or a similar course. The goal of both Umoja and Puente is to provide a community that deliver support and mentorship that is culturally relevant to historically marginalized populations to foster a sense of belonging and increase student success.

Student Services professionals provide essential services to the diverse student body. As such, mid-level Student Services leaders are critical in leading their areas to move the needle forward in student equity and success. In order to fully understand the role of mid- level Student Services leaders, it is important to understand the structure of Student Services.

Leadership Structure Within Student Services

Under the Vice President of Student Services, there can be a number of deans that serve in various capacities, such as a Dean of Counseling or a dean position that oversees multiple programs such as a Dean of Special Programs. Under a Dean in the Student

Services area, there are often directors that serve in various departments that may report to the Dean. An example is a Director of EOPS who may report to a Dean of Student Services. In some colleges, some of the directors report directly to the Vice President. Each college may have different titles and reporting structures for the Student Services positions but they often have similar duties. Most often, mid-level Student Services leaders are considered educational administrators as defined by Title V in California Education Code and are required to minimally possess a master's degree. Regardless of their different titles and reporting structures, mid-level leaders within Student Services are responsible for ensuring the delivery of critical support services that serve the California Community Colleges' fundamental mission of achieving greater student access, retention, and success, especially among historically marginalized populations.

Critical Role of Mid-Level Leaders Within Student Services

Mid-level leaders like deans and directors are an essential group of leaders who are vital to the mission and goals of the academic institution (Mather, Bryan, & Faulkner, 2009; Rosser, 2004). Mid-level leaders are essential in developing policies, procedures, and processes in their colleges and the departments that they manage. Additionally, they play an important role for policy setting across the organization, implementation of the local vision, collaboratively refining processes to better serve students, and ensuring that critical services are delivered. Mid-level leaders like deans and directors are the intermediary between the decision making and the actual implementation of the decision (Rosser, 2004). Just as Rosser (2004) described the importance of mid-level leaders like deans and directors, Ellis and Moon (1991), Jensen (2000) and R. Young (2007) took this concept one step further, explaining that Student Service mid-level leaders are often the

bridge between the executive leadership and the front-line staff, making their positions critical. The importance of being the bridge between executive leadership and front-line staff ranges from daily practices to institutional policies. In fact, the need to be the bridge to inform policies can be seen in the work of Maher et al. (2009), who shared that being an informant of policy shaping allows them the unique view of policy creation along with the difficulties of implementation and enforcement. From policy shaping to informing daily practices, mid-level leaders play a critical role in the overall function of the institution.

A key challenge for mid-level leaders is to dissect the big picture as it is shared by upper administration and communicate that message in a clear, concrete to front-line staff. Jensen (2000) found that mid-level leaders in higher education had significant complexity in terms of decision-making and cognitive overload in their positions as compared to other staff. The mid-level leaders are often expected to foster effectiveness despite having limited formal authority. Therefore, it is critical that mid-level leaders possess strong leadership skills because they will be critical to the delivery of the institution's message, vision, and mission across the campus community (Brunson, 2019).

Equity-Minded Mid-Level Leaders Within Student Services

As mid-level leaders who work under the direction of the Vice President of Student Services, these professionals lead diverse teams who then provide direct service to a diverse student population. According to Rosser (2004), mid-level leaders are committed and dedicated leaders who understand the urgency of providing effective leadership for the areas over which they have influence but are rarely given opportunities

to grow their leadership skills through professional development and training. Mid-level leaders must be adaptable, be able to manage process, and provide leadership for their teams (Parrish, 2015). Mid-level leaders within Student Services set the precedent for their staff. The daily practice of leadership requires an intentional focus on leadership activities and the people involved (Day, Fleenor, McKee, Atwater, & Sturm, 2014).

As a mid-level leader, it is essential to encompass all of the aforementioned activities and traits by building a culture of inclusivity and diversity. Riehl (2000) found that culturally responsive leaders are "fostering new meanings about diversity, promoting inclusive practices within schools, and building connections about schools and communities" (p. 56). Culturally responsive leaders essentially combine knowledge with communication skills and develop an openness both with staff and students (Gordon & Ronder, 2016). Furthermore, Bensimon, Rueda, Dowd, and Harris (2007) identified the following qualities of an equity-minded practitioner in higher education:

- Being color conscious as opposed to color blind in an affirmative sense; to be color-conscious means noticing and questioning patterns of educational outcomes that reveal unexplainable differences for minority students; viewing inequalities in the context of a history of exclusion, discrimination, and educational apartheid.
- Being aware that beliefs, expectations, and practices can be racialized unintentionally. Examples of racialization include attributing unequal outcomes to students' cultural predispositions and basing academic practices assumptions about the capacity or ambitions of minority students.

- Being willing to assume responsibility for the elimination of inequality. Rather than viewing inequalities as predictable and natural, an equity-minded practitioner would allow for the possibility that they might be created or exacerbated by taken-for-granted practices and policies, inadequate knowledge, a lack of cultural know-how, or the absence of institutional support.
- Being able to demonstrate authentic caring (Valenzuela, 1999). To care authentically means to reach out to students proactively and give them the tools they need to succeed-e.g., teaching them how to study, showing them how to format a paper. Authentic care encompasses substantial help-giving actions and should not be confused with being understanding or sympathetic. While understanding and sympathy may provide the motivation for help-giving actions, they are not sufficient to make a difference in minority students' lives. (pp. 32-33)

However, as Bensimon (2007) noted, to date most student success research has focused on the traits or readiness of students and is missing a broader perspective. By missing, Bensimon is referring to the lack of research on the "knowledge, beliefs, experiences, education, sense of self-efficacy, etc." (p. 444) of administrators, faculty, and staff and its influence on the educational experiences of marginalized students.

Understanding the importance of culturally responsive leadership, the American Association of Community Colleges (2018) has asserted that one of the major competencies of an effective community college mid-level leader is to "develop and maintain responsive, cooperative, mutually beneficial, and ethical internal and external

relationships that nurture diversity, promote the success of the college community, and sustain the community college mission" (p. 32). Ensuring that each department within Student Services is building a culture of inclusivity is the responsibility of these mid-level leaders. Mid-level leaders are critical to the function, growth, and success of community colleges in their service to diverse staff and students. Being culturally responsive is an essential characteristic of an effective modern Student Services leader. Therefore, it is essential to understand the theoretical frameworks of cultural responsiveness.

Theoretical Foundations

Mid-level leaders in higher education, arguably, are positioned to be the backbone of the institution. As such, the day-to-day decisions these leaders make have profound impact on the overall organization's ability to thrive. Mid-level leaders navigate through complex issues that influence the culture of diversity and inclusivity for students and for staff. Therefore, to serve diverse students and staff effectively, a leader must cultivate a culture of cultural responsiveness. Several key frameworks have laid the foundation for cultural responsiveness including CRT, CRSL, and applied critical leadership.

Critical Race Theory

CRT has its origins in the legal scholarship of Derrick Bell (1995) and Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2012) but has been used as a theoretical framework in educational equity research (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Santamaría, 2014). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) contended that race has continued to play a significant role in society, including in education. CRT holds that racism is not just built on individual bias

but embedded in policies, procedures, laws, and institutions. Delgado and Stefanic (2001) identified the following hallmarks of CRT:

1. *Racism is the ordinary experiences for people of color and difficult to cure and address.* This tenet purports that racism is a pervasive and ordinary experience for people of color. Racism has become more overt, subtle, and engrained in our culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Additionally, the concept of "colorblindness" in American culture, which believes in equal treatment across the board, can only remedy some of the blatant forms of racism through legislation,
2. *Racism results in material wealth for the dominant culture so there is little interest in addressing the issue.* Bell's (1980) theory of interest convergence is an important aspect of CRT. The majority have power and thus make the common beliefs of the group. Interest convergence within CRT means that the majority White population will support racial progress to the extent that there is a positive gain in it for them as well.
3. *Racism is a social construct based upon thought not based upon any actual biological or genetic differences.* People of similar origins can have similar physical features like hair and skin tone, but this similarity does not apply to higher order traits like personality or intelligence. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) stated that "race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality" (p. 6).

4. *Racialization or discrimination against varying minority groups due to socioeconomic shifts.* During different time periods, different minority groups have been racialized due to socioeconomic changes. An example of this is the Bracero Program and Operation Wetback during World War II. During that time, over four million Mexican workers were brought to the U.S. to fill the labor needs of the United States and its allies. After the war ended, the Mexican nationals began to be deported from the United States.
5. *The intersectionality of race, gender, national origin, and sexual orientation combinations make identity complex.* This framework contends that the intersectionality of race and other identities such as sex and class make identity a complex nature of power and privilege.
6. *Unique voices* – Due to their different histories and experiences, it is essential to hear the voices of people of color to better understand their lived experiences. It is essential that the voices of the marginalized be heard and nurtured.

Ladson-Billings (1998) pioneered CRT in the field of education by using the framework to explore inequities. CRT lays the foundations to understand how race and gender influence curriculum bias, teacher perceptions, classroom structure, etc. (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Rodríguez & Greer, 2017). Ladson-Billings (1998) argued that CRT can be utilized to understand institutional racism in education, and through this research radical solutions can be brought to the table to eradicate it. CRT proposes using storytelling to unlearn beliefs through counter-storytelling (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). Additionally, Pollack and Zirkel (2013) argued that the CRT lens can

help an educational leader anticipate and overcome resistance to equity-driven reforms. Pollack and Zirkel identified three concepts within CRT lens that explain the resistance to equity-driven initiatives:

1. *Property and Property Rights* – Those who reap the benefits of our current educational system have a sense of ownership or entitlement and thus will resist change. Identifying property or property rights will offer the leader a deep understanding of the opposition to the initiative.
2. *Majoritarian Narratives* – Legacy stories of privilege carry assumptions and beliefs. Delgado and Stefanic (1993) defined majoritarian stories as a "bundle of presuppositions, perceived wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant race bring to the discussion of race" (p.462). Having an understanding of the majority stories will allow the leader to understand and address the concerns from the majority.
3. *Interest convergence* – As leaders attempt to address issues of equity, it can create polarization on both sides of the issues. The greater the polarization, the greater the anger and resistance will be. A leader can instead leverage the gains for both sides and create a win-win atmosphere. (p. 297)

Through the CRT lens, an academic leader can understand the concerns that they will face and develop an interest convergence that will most likely lead to successful implementation of an equity-driven initiative. CRT was further enhanced through the CRSL model, which provided specific practices that can be implemented by leadership within a K-12 setting.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership

The CRSL framework strived to prepare school leaders to build an inclusive and positive school culture in which students of color feel valued. Khalifa et al. (2016) established four components of a CRSL framework:

1. *Critical Self Reflection* – Leaders must have an awareness of their own perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and dispositions when it comes to serving poor low socioeconomic status students of color, which has been termed critical consciousness (Brown, 2004; Dantley, 2005; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Gooden, 2005). A leader's own critical consciousness when it comes to race and culture sets the foundation for the institution.
2. *Developing Culturally Responsive Teachers* **–** Leaders play a critical role in hiring and retention of culturally responsive teachers and ensuring that they remain culturally responsive in their practice (Khalifa et al., 2016). It is essential to have culturally responsive teacher preparation programs, whether they are university-based credentialing programs or professional development in the field, even when the teachers are from the same cultural or racial backgrounds of the students that they serve (Gay, 2002, 2010; Irvine, 2002; Ware, 2006). Effective leaders must have a thorough understanding of cultural responsiveness to challenge common inequities that create disenfranchisement of poor students of color and model culturally responsive practices (Khalifa et al., 2016; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).
3. *Promoting Responsive Environments* **–** An effective leader must be a school principal who consistently builds and promotes a culturally responsive

environment. To achieve this goal, the leader must be able to have courageous conversations and address inequities present within the institution. This includes being an instructional leader who ensures that culturally affirming curriculum and resources are utilized to build an inclusive school culture for students, especially students of color (Ainscow, 2005; Khalifa et al., 2016; Riehl, 2000).

4. *Engaging Students & Parents* – An effective leader must be able to engage students, parents, and communities in culturally appropriate ways (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Although the CRSL framework carries forward the key elements of literature on cultural responsiveness within the K-12 context, Santamaría and Santamaría (2016) utilized CRT components and other culturally responsive practices to develop the applied critical leadership framework and applied it to higher education.

Applied Critical Leadership

Applied critical leadership is a strengths-based approach that encompasses the lens of social justice and educational equity with its theoretical foundations from critical multiculturalism, transformative leadership, and CRT (Ladson-Billings, 2009; May & Sleeter, 2010; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012; Shields, 2010). In this framework, the leader leads through the lens of CRT while utilizing transformative leadership and critical multiculturalism and leaning on the positive aspects of the leader's own journey (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012). Through critical multiculturalism, the leader moves from theory to practice, providing an environment in which the diverse individual voices of students of color are heard and internalized into practice. The leader is keenly in tune

with how language, culture, race, and experience influence not only a student's journey but also their own. Through transformative leadership, the leader examines and navigates the position of the organization through the complex political and historical reality with the lens of equity and social justice (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016).

According to emerging literature (Fitzpatrick & Santamaría, 2015; L. Johnson & Fuller, 2014; Santamaría, Lee, & Harker, 2014), applied critical leaders exhibit the following characteristics summarized by Santamaría and Santamaría (2016):

1. Willingness to initiate and engage in critical conversations with individuals and groups even when the topic was not popular for the greater good of the whole.
2. Willingness to choose to assume a Critical Race Theory lens in order to consider multiple perspectives.
3. Use consensus building as the preferred strategy for decision-making.
4. Feeling for the need to make empirical contributions.
5. Feeling the need to honor all members of the constituencies. (p. 7)

In addition to the aforementioned traits, an applied critical educational leader is driven by moral imperatives (Fullan, 2003; Fullan, Cuttress, & Kilcher, 2005): an internal quest for moral action to develop an ideal institute.

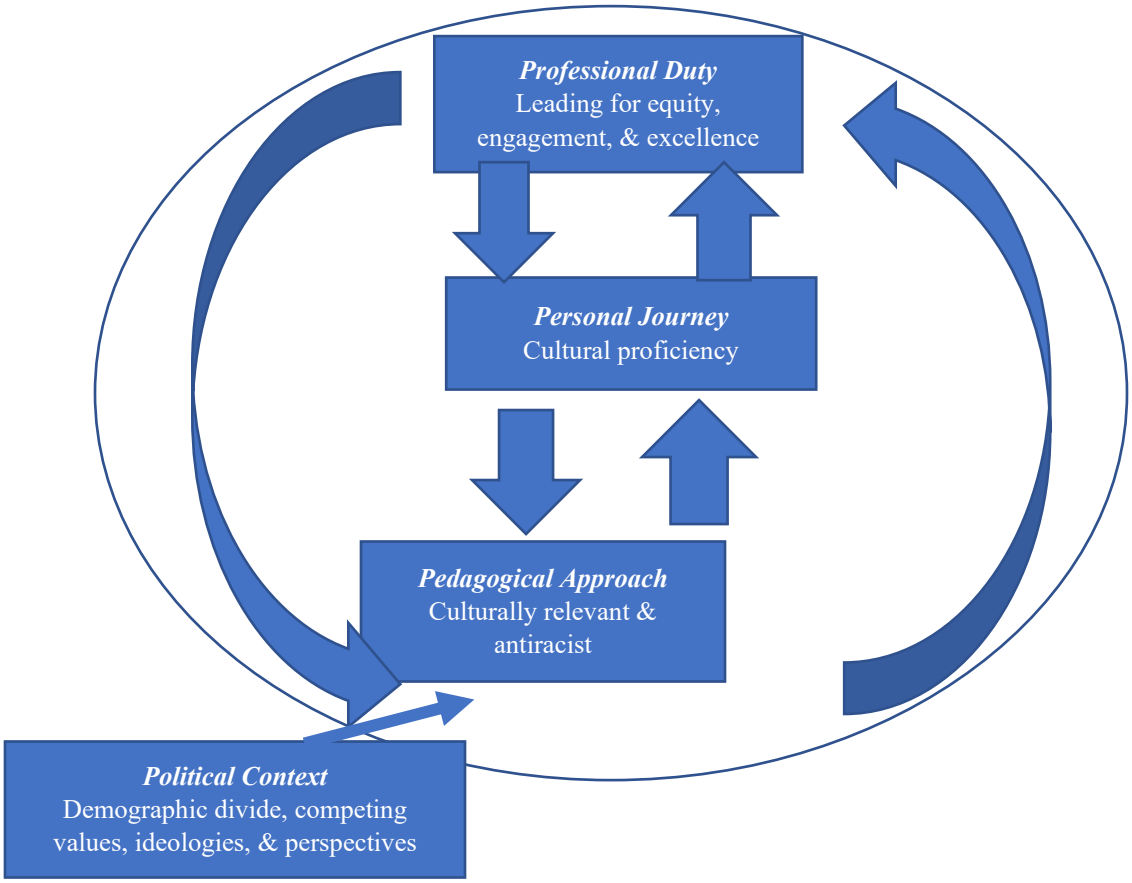
CRT, CRSL, and applied critical leadership frameworks have significant overlap and provide a theoretical foundation for understanding culturally responsive effective leadership. As higher education mid-level leaders within Student Services lead culturally diverse teams that serve culturally diverse students, their own lived experiences and identity play a key role. The following section covers the conceptual framework utilized

for this ethnographic study, which examined the lived experiences of mid-level Student Services leaders within the California Community Colleges.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study, which encompasses the theoretical foundations and emerging research on cultural responsiveness, was culturally relevant leadership by Horsford et al. (2011). This conceptual framework captures the key elements of the aforementioned theoretical foundations, and it can be applied holistically to the lived experiences of mid-level Student Services leaders within the California Community Colleges. The Horsford et al. conceptual framework for culturally relevant leadership has four distinct categories of political context, pedagogical approach, personal journey, and professional duty, as outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework



Personal Journey

An effective leader must have a personalized, internalized understanding of the guiding principles of cultural proficiency to build cultural capacity and growth (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). An effective culturally responsive leader must be able to measure and assess their efficacy when working with the diverse students and communities they serve and must question and acknowledge their deeply held assumptions and beliefs about students who come from diverse backgrounds or experiences that are different than their own. An effective leader has commitment to cultural proficiency gained through self-reflection, life experiences, and the intersection of multiple personal identities. The leader is reflective regarding their own assumptions and practices about equity, inclusion, and student achievement while still pushing the institution to assess and address the institutional policies and procedures that create barriers for historically disadvantaged students. Additionally, the leader must be aware of the resistance they will face as they tackle oppressive practices and identify privilege (Horsford et al., 2011).

Professional Duty

A leader's education, preparation, and experience all influence their practice. This is characterized by a sense of obligation to lead for equity, engagement, and excellence.. Unlike K-12 administrators in California, higher education leaders are not required to go through a formalized leadership training program. However, there are ample opportunities for current and future higher education leaders to participate in professional development opportunities within their district or through organizations such as the Association of California Community College Administrators and the Foundation for Community Colleges.

The American Association of Community Colleges (2018) published the necessary professional competencies of an effective mid-level community college leader including:

- Embraces the mission, vision, and values of the community college, and acknowledges the significance of the institution's past while charting a path for its future.
- Supports student success across the institution, and embraces opportunities to improve access, retention, and success.
- Understands the review processes for programs or performance to effectively lead efforts for improvement.
- Embraces role as a leader within the organization. As a mid-manager, you have influence which gives you the ability to lead change from the middle.
- Understands how to use data in ways that give a holistic representation of the institution's performance, and is open to the fact that data might reveal unexpected or previously unknown trends or issues
- Understands and embraces the importance of championing community college ideals, understands how to mobilize stakeholders to take action on behalf of the college, and understands how to use all of the communications resources available to connect with the college community
- Cultivates relationships across sectors that support the institution and advance the community college agenda.

- Develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, mutually beneficial, and ethical internal and external relationships that nurture diversity, promote the success of the college community, and sustain the community college mission
- Has courage to try new strategies that can improve the services that you provide to constituents.
- Approaches interactions with students, peers, and college leaders by promoting trust, good behavior, fairness, and/or kindness.
- Seeks opportunities to gain knowledge about the cultures of the students that you serve so that you may focus on more customized ways to help them succeed.
- Understands that every student does not receive information in the same way, and that generational differences can impact the way a student engages with the college. Be willing to adapt your administrative strategies to reach students from different generations so they can meet their goals. (pp. 23-33)

Community colleges are complex evolving institutions. Through skilled leadership, mid-level leaders have the opportunity to bring change that leads to greater positive outcomes for students especially students of color.

Pedagogical Approach

Pedagogically sound teachers build a positive learning environment within their classrooms by building on the strengths of their students' cultural and ethnic diversity. Cultural and personal expression of diverse student voices and experiences are actively weaved into the learning and teaching process (Gay, 2000). Just like teachers do in their classroom, the culturally relevant leader must lead the charge to build and nurture a

school culture and environment that supports student engagement and learning through cultural affirmation (Horsford, 2010; Morris, 2008). The pedagogical approach is essentially the pedagogical strategies utilized to build a culturally relevant and antiracist school culture. In addition, the leader must be an instructional leader who utilizes and is attuned to the importance of culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogy to influence student instruction, engagement, and success (Hallinger, 2003; McKenzie & Locke, 2010; McKenzie, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2006).

Political Context

School performance has become very politicized and racialized. There is no collective empirical evidence that intellectual abilities are varied biologically based upon race or socioeconomic status. However, there is a clear gap in achievement "between students according to race in practically every measure and evaluation of academic achievement" especially among White and Black students in the United States (Horsford et al., 2011, p. 595). Often such differences in performance have been attributed to extraneous forces like unequal distribution of resources among schools even in the same community (Kozol, 1991, 2005), negative school experiences especially among Black male students (Voight, Hanson, O'Malley, & Adekayne, 2015), or living in low socioeconomic status communities with schools that lack access to resources.

There continues to be pressure from the federal government, educators, business leaders, parents, social justice advocates, and community stakeholders to address equity gaps and effectively serve students who represent varied backgrounds, life experiences, and cultural contexts (Cooper, 2009, 2010; Dancy & Horsford, 2010; Horsford, 2010; Murakani-Ramalho, 2010; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). An effective leader in today's

school system must be able to navigate through an often contentious environment that has competing priorities while pushing forward equity and positive student outcomes. According to Horsford et al. (2011), the leader must be able to administer any federal, state, or district required policies and procedures while being able to "discern and analyze the educational ideologies, philosophical assumptions, and political perspectives that both underlie the creation and framing of such policies and practices" (p. 595). Fowler (2009) found that today's school leaders must "rely on such leadership tools as persuasion, coalition building, and political strategies" (p. 13). This dimension incorporates the historical, cultural, and political contexts in which the institution and leader operate and recognizes that competing values, ideologies, and perspectives may exist. Culturally responsive leaders must use those tools to navigate through this difficult terrain of politics and education while pushing forward equity actively and courageously.

Summary

California Community Colleges were created with the mission of providing greater access to residents in pursuit of higher education. Today's California Community Colleges provide access to higher education to a very diverse population of 2.1 million students (CCCCO, 2020b). However, access does not equal completion. Students of color, especially Latino/a and African American students, have a significantly lower completion rates than White students. The California Community Colleges have launched multiple initiatives to increase student completion rates and close the achievement gap.

Many of the equity-minded initiatives are led by Student Services. The division of Student Services at each of the California Community Colleges provides delivery of key services such as financial aid, admissions, and counseling to diverse California

Community College students throughout their educational journey. Each of the departments or several departments together is led by a mid-level leader. The titles of the mid-level leaders vary from campus to campus. These leaders provide leadership to their staff and department while being the voice of students for senior leadership and across the campus.

Mid-level leaders impact the culture of diversity and inclusivity for their staff and the students. The mid-level leader must masterfully cultivate a culture of cultural responsiveness. Through the theoretical framework of CRT, the conceptual framework of culturally relevant leadership (Horsford et al., 2011) was utilized in this study. The four prongs of culturally relevant leadership (political context, professional duty, pedagogy approach, and personal journey) were applied in this study of the lived experiences of mid-level Student Services leaders in California Community Colleges.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLGY

Overview

Chapter I presented an introduction to the study and background of the research. Additionally, the chapter provided the research question, the statement and significance of the research problem, definitions, delimitations, and the organization of the study. Furthermore, Chapter I provided an introduction to different types of leadership styles including cultural responsiveness, structure of community college leadership, and the nature of Student Services. Chapter II reviewed the literature to provide an in-depth background of the history of higher education in California, leadership, and cultural responsiveness. Additionally, the chapter provided a review of mid-level leadership within Student Services of the California Community Colleges.

Chapter III presents the qualitative methodology utilized to conduct this ethnographic research study. This study explored the lived experiences of California Community College mid-level leaders in Student Services and their utilization of culturally responsive leadership practices. This chapter reviews the purpose statement and research question, rationale for the research design, population, sample, instrumentation to establish validity and reliability, data collection and analysis, and summary of the chapter's essential considerations.

Purpose

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to identify and describe how mid-level California Community College Student Services leaders are culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework.

Research Question

How are mid-level California Community College Student Services leaders culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework?

Research Sub-Questions

Based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework:

1. How does one's sense of professional duty influence mid-level California Community College Student Services leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
2. How does one's personal journey influence mid-level California Community College Student Services leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
3. How does one's pedagogical approach influence mid-level California Community College Student Services leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
4. How do political contexts influence mid-level California Community College Student Services leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

Research Design

According to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), the purpose of a research design is to have a specific plan for the collection of data that will result in reaching the most reliable and valid conclusions. Because this study investigated the lived experiences of mid-level Student Services leaders, the most appropriate research design was a qualitative

one. Qualitative data is often gathered in natural occurrences and most of the data is gathered in the form of words. Through qualitative design, the researcher uses inductive analysis through observations and interviews and takes an exploratory approach to questions. The data gathered through semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and artifacts is then coded for major and minor themes. A qualitative design often utilizes purposeful sampling to ensure participants meet the predetermined criteria, thus making the sample size much smaller than quantitative design (Patton, 2012). Based on the need for a deep understanding of the lived experiences of mid-level community college Student Services leaders, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate.

In approaching qualitative research, the researcher must determine the best strategy for data collection based on the research questions and overall nature of the study. For this study, it was determined that the best approach to utilize was ethnography, a method that focuses on the experiences within a specified cultural or social group (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). According to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), culture is defined as the "shared patterns of beliefs, thinking, language, expectations, behaviors, and meanings" (p. 344). The goal of data collection in this ethnographic study is to investigate the culture of middle level Student Services leaders within the California Community College system and their use of culturally responsive leadership strategies.

The data for an ethnography study is often gathered through semi-structured interviews, observations, and investigation of artifacts. Through this data collection methodologies, specific themes are identified. The themes are the lens through which the researcher could identify a better understanding of how middle level Student Services

within the California Community College leaders utilize culturally responsive leadership practices.

Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a population as a group of individuals who have meet the specified criteria and to whom the researcher seeks to generalize the results of the research study. This study investigated how mid-level California Community College Student Services leaders utilize culturally responsive leadership strategies. There are 116 California Community Colleges. It is estimated that there are four to 10 mid-level student services leaders at each community college, based on the structure and size of the college. As such, the population for this study ranged from 464-1160.

Sample

According to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), a sample is the group of participants or subjects in a research study. Creswell (1998) explained that the sample is taken from the larger population pool; thus, the sample is representative of the whole population. Based on the population for this study, which is estimated at approximately 464-1160, a sample of 15 was used for this study.

Sampling Procedures

Sampling procedures for this study consisted of two steps. Step one of the sampling procedures involved criterion sampling. Criterion sampling, as defined by Patton (2012), involves "selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (p. 238). To participate in the study, the participants needed to meet specific criteria. The criteria for participants for this study were as follows:

- Be employed by a California Community College
- Must be a mid-level leader, usually a dean or director, within Student Services
- Have at least 3 years' experience as a mid-level leader

Step two of the sampling procedure involved convenience sampling, which entails selecting subjects based on being accessible (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). In line with McMillian and Schumacher's (2010) definition of convenience sampling, the researcher interviewed the first 15 leaders who responded to the recruitment email.

Instrumentation

For this qualitative study, the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation. Data was gathered primarily through semi-structured interviews and artifact collection. The semi-structured interviews consisted of pre-determined open-ended questions, allowing for follow-up questions to provide a rich understanding of the utilization of culturally responsive leadership practices of middle level Student Services leaders.

Researcher as an Instrument

As defined by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), a researcher as an instrument refers to the researcher being an active respondent in the research study process. Through the process of facilitating the conversation, the researcher skillfully provides a safe space for the respondents to share their lived experiences (Owens, 2006). The researcher manages the flow of communication in a way that puts the respondents as ease, providing opportunities for the respondents to share their experiences and insider knowledge without limitations.

The focus of this study was to describe and identify the culturally responsive leadership practices of mid-level Student Services leaders within the California Community College system. The researcher has extensive experience as a Student Services leader in the California Community Colleges. As a result of the researcher being an instrument of the study, there is a potential for bias due to the researcher's own experiences. Bias can be a threat to the trustworthiness of a research study. As a result, the researcher has built safeguards to remain vigilant to manage potential bias by refraining from sharing her own stories during the interviews and by ensuring a neutral data interpretation process.

Interview Questions

Open-ended interview questions were scripted prior to data collection to ensure that each respondent would be directed to the same prompt. The interview questions were created with intentionality and aligned with Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework. This framework asserts that culturally relevant leaders display the following skill set:

- Effectively navigate the political context in schools
- Synthesize a culturally relevant pedagogical approach
- Embark on a personal journey to cultural proficiency
- Demonstrate a commitment to a professional duty

Through a semi-structured interview process, the Student Service leaders shared their lived experiences on the professional, personal, pedagogical, and political contexts. The questions and protocol (see Appendices A & B) were reviewed by an expert panel to ensure validity and alignment with the culturally relevant leadership framework.

Validity

Validity is defined as the accuracy of the depiction of the participants' realities in a qualitative study (Schwandt, 1997). To receive accurate findings, it is essential to have instrument validity. According to Patton (2012), instrument validity is to the degree in which the questions asked in the interview, along with observation, align with the research questions. To ensure instrument validity, a researcher can actively take steps to ensure that the instruments utilized within the study measure what they are intended to measure.

Expert Panel

To protect the integrity of the study, the instrument questions and interview protocols (See Appendices A & B) were reviewed by an expert panel to ensure validity and alignment with the purpose of the study. Each of the expert panel members had to meet three of the following five requirements:

1. A minimum of 10 years of work experience in higher education
2. Were currently or previously employed at a California Community College.
3. Possess at least a master's degree.
4. A minimum of at least 5 years of higher education management experience.
5. Were a published author in higher education.

The three-member expert panel provided feedback on the structure and content of the interview questions and protocol to ensure that it aligned with the purpose of the study and met rigorous research standards for validity.

Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was conducted prior to the launch of data collection to ensure that the researcher's interview skills were refined and fine-tuned. For this process, an expert was identified for the pilot interview. The expert is a current Vice President of Student Services within a California Community Colleges; they also have qualitative experience at the doctoral level and have provided feedback to others on the interviewing process. The expert observed the researcher conduct a mock interview and provided feedback on the interview skills. The expert provided feedback on the interview's tone, pacing, probing, and follow up questions to ensure that the researcher was calibrated and validated. Furthermore, the expert was able to provide feedback on the order of the interview questions.

Reliability

Joppe (2000) defined reliability as the results being consistent over time and accurate in their representation of the total population of the study. With reliability, the same study using the same instruments and protocols should be able to be reproduced and yield the same results. For the purposes of this study, a three-member expert panel provided feedback on the interview questions and protocol to ensure that both were valid and in alignment with the purpose of the study. The following additional protocols were taken to ensure reliability.

Internal Reliability

Consistency in data collection, analysis, and interpretation are essential components of reliability. Triangulation is a process of cross-checking the data from multiple sources to ensure the results are valid (O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003). With

triangulation, multiple perspectives are examined, common themes are identified, and data from various sources are cross-validated. The researcher applied data triangulation techniques using interviews, objective observations, and artifact collection to improve the internal credibility of the study (Creswell, 2013). Through these multiple methods of data collection, the researcher helped to identify a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of mid-level Student Services leaders.

External Reliability

External reliability refers to the generalizability of the study's findings to the larger population (Patton, 2012). Through this study, the lived experiences of mid-level Student Services leaders were examined. Although this study describes the lived experiences and insights on culturally responsive practices of mid-level Student Services leaders, the results cannot be generalized to the experiences of all California Community Colleges mid-level Student Services leaders.

Intercoder Reliability

According to Patton (2012), inter-coder reliability refers to the accuracy of the data coded for themes and frequency as tested by an independent researcher. For this research study, a fellow doctoral student who had experience with qualitative research and understood the purpose of the study was selected as the independent researcher. The doctoral student participated in coding data obtained through the interview process, an observation, and artifact interpretation with approximately 10% of the data. This process served to confirm the reliability of the data collected. To ensure the accuracy of the data, 90% agreement of the coded data is ideal and 80% is considered acceptable (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002).

Data Collection

The three primary methods of data collection, (a) interviews, (b) informal observations, and (c) artifact examination, were utilized in this ethnography study to explore the lived experiences of mid-level Student Services leaders. Creswell and Miller (2000) define triangulation as the process of examining data from multiple sources and multiple perspectives, to identify common themes, and cross validate. The varied data collection methods were utilized to triangulate the findings.

Participants for this study were requested after receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of University of Massachusetts Global. The IRB ensures that safeguards are in place to protect the participants in the research study. Following the IRB approval, the participants were emailed an explanation of the scope of the study and the following documents:

1. Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix C)
2. Informed Consent Form (Appendix D)

The Bill of Rights ensures that participants know that participation in the study is voluntary, their identities will be kept anonymous, and that no incentive will be provided. Additionally, the researcher completed the Human Research Subjects training (Appendix E) from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), which included training on ethics, assessing risk, and informed consent.

Solicitation for participation for this research study was done through California Community College listservs and email addresses gathered through college websites. Once identified as a participant for the study, the mid-level leader was contacted via email or phone to discuss delivery of the Bill of Rights and the Informed Consent Form,

and to schedule a Zoom interview. The researcher made sure to receive the signed Informed Consent Form prior to the interview. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and following federal, state, and institutional restrictions, all interviews were conducted on Zoom. Prior to the interview, the participants were provided an opportunity to learn about how to utilize Zoom in case they were unfamiliar with the platform. Each of the interviews was recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Types of Data

Qualitative research studies gather data on naturally occurring events measured in words rather than numbers (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). According to Patton (2012), there are three types of data collected for a qualitative study: open-ended interviews, direct observations, and artifacts. For this research study, which sought to identify and describing the culturally responsive practices of mid-level Student Services leaders, interviews and artifacts were utilized as data.

Interviews. The primary data collection method utilized for this study was interview. A total of 15 mid-level California Community Colleges Student Services leaders were interviewed on their culturally responsive leadership practices. The questions for the interview were semi-structured, allowing for preparation and intentionality but leaving room for flexibility to probe further into the responses. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, guidelines and restrictions from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), state, and institution were followed to ensure the safety and well-being of the participants and researcher during interviews. As a result, all interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure the capture of all relevant data.

Prior to the interviews, questions and protocol for the interview were reviewed by an expert panel that provided feedback to ensure alignment with the purpose of the study and to Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework. Additionally, the researcher utilized a qualitative researcher expert to conduct a pilot interview. The expert observed the researcher conduct a mock interview and provided feedback on the interview skills. Through this process, the researcher's interview skills were calibrated and validated.

Artifacts. This study focused on the culturally responsive practices of mid-level Student Services leaders. To capture the full data, it was important to review artifacts, which often take the form of written documents. According to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), it is possible for artifacts to take the form of either personal or official documents, or even objects that provide insights into a participant's experiences, knowledge, and values. For this study, artifacts were collected from 15 Student Services leaders, including documents, policies and procedures, mission and vision statements, strategic goals, website information, relevant information from the last accreditation report, and equity goals. These artifacts were used as a basis to triangulate data from interviews and observations.

Data Collection Procedures

An overview of the data collection techniques developed by the researcher is presented in this section. To conduct this study, the researcher recruited 16 California Community College Student Services leaders during the Spring 2022 semester. In addition, the researcher conducted site visits or participated in Zoom meetings to observe the participants and their interactions.

Recruitment. The researcher sent solicitations to participate via California Community College listservs and email addresses gathered from websites targeting Student Services leaders (Appendix F). The email contained information about the purpose of the study, the extent of the commitment for the participants, and the contact information for the researcher. The Student Services leaders who reached out with an interest to participate were sent an email that included an informational letter regarding the purpose of the study (Appendix B), the participant Bill of Rights (Appendix C), and the Informed Consent Form (Appendix D). Then with mutual agreement through email or a phone call, a Zoom interview date was solidified, and the researcher and participant discussed potential observation opportunities and the collection of artifacts. The Informed Consent Form signed by the participant was received prior to any interview, observation, or collection of artifacts.

Interviews. After participants were recruited, an interview date was set individually with each participant. Each participant was additionally offered a session prior to the interview date to review the use of Zoom if the participant was unfamiliar with the technology. The interviews were set for a date, time, and location that worked ideally for the participant to ensure that the participant felt comfortable and uninhibited. Before the interview began, the researcher reviewed the purpose of the study and the Participant's Bill of Rights with the interviewee. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the participant understood that their participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time. The following procedures were employed to begin data collection.

1. The researcher sent solicitations to participate via California Community College listservs and email addresses gathered from websites targeting Student Services leaders (Appendix F).
2. The solicitation emails communicated essential information such as purpose of the study, the significance of the study, and how participants could contact the researcher if they were interested in participating.
3. The researcher followed up with all requests to participate that came in via an email or phone call.
4. Each of the identified participants was emailed the purpose of the study, Informed Consent Form, and Participant's Bill of Rights.
5. The researcher sent a follow-up email within 1 week of the original email if a signed Informed Consent Form was not received.
6. Upon agreement to participate in the study, the researcher scheduled a follow-up phone call or email to discuss the interview and schedule a time and date.
    a. The researcher encouraged the participant to select a day and time that best met their scheduling needs.
    b. The researcher encouraged the participant to select a location to participate in the Zoom interview that would be free from distractions, and where they would feel comfortable speaking openly.
    c. The researcher ensured that the participant understood their rights under the Bill of Rights. The researcher also ensured receipt of a signed Informed Consent Form received from the participant.

7. Prior to the interview, the researcher emailed the interview questions to the participants.
8. Prior to the interview, the participant was sent the Zoom link for the interview and offered a use of Zoom training session if the participant was unfamiliar with the technology.
9. The researcher provided the participants with her personal phone number in the event that the participant had questions or concerns prior to the interview.
10. The researcher sent a reminder email 1 day prior to the interview to each participant with the Zoom link.
11. Prior to beginning the interview, the researcher began with an introduction to ensure each participant felt comfortable.
    a. The researcher provided an overview of the purpose of the study.
    b. The participants were provided with another copy of the Participants Bill of Rights and a copy of the signed Informed Consent Form.
    c. The researcher reviewed the participant's rights and communicated their right to take breaks or stop the interview at any time.
    d. The researcher provided a copy of the signed consent form and verbally confirmed the participant's willingness to participate in the Zoom interview.
    e. The researcher reminded the participants that the Zoom interview would be recorded and transcribed.
    f. Participants were reminded that no compensation would be provided for participating in the study.

g. Participants were informed that their participation would remain anonymous and confidential. All personal and identifiable information was removed to protect confidentiality.

h. Data collected, such as recordings, transcripts, and field notes were kept in a locked location accessible to the principal researcher. The records will be shredded and destroyed 3 years after the conclusion of this study.

12. The researcher conducted a 45-minute semi-structured interview with open-ended questions.
13. The researcher transcribed the recorded interviews.
14. The researcher shared the transcriptions with the participants to ensure accuracy and clarity.
15. Upon review, additional follow-up interviews were arranged if needed.
16. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. Additionally, all related data collected were stored in a locked location that was only accessible to the principal researcher. The records will be shredded and destroyed after 3 years of the conclusion of this study.
17. Preparation was made to code the data from the interviews.

Artifacts. The researcher discussed potential artifacts prior to each assigned interview and requested that participants email them as soon as feasible. Additionally, the researcher also researched public documents available on the each of the participants college website. Many of the proposed artifacts were considered public information, such as the college's equity plan, thus no informed consent was required; however, for

artifacts that were confidential in nature, such as evaluations, the researcher obtained written consent. Individual identities were protected by removing any personally identifiable information. Each artifact was analyzed, copied, recorded, transcribed, and stored in a locked, secure location. All digital artifacts were stored digitally and backed up on a password-protected external hard drive. The external hard drive was stored in a secure locked location when not being utilized for this research study. The records will be shredded or deleted and permanently destroyed after 3 years of the conclusion of this study.

1. Following the completion of the interviews, the researcher asked whether any artifacts belonging to the participant were available to help validate the information provided during the interview or virtual observation. Written permission was secured prior to utilization of any private documents.
2. The researcher redacted any personal and identifiable information from the artifacts.
3. After review, and if necessary, additional follow-up was conducted with the specific participant.
4. The researcher assigned pseudonyms to participants' artifacts. All artifacts and related data collected has been stored in a locked location only accessible to the principal researcher. The records will be shredded and destroyed after 3 years of the conclusion of this study.
5. Preparation was made to code the artifacts.

Data Protection and Control

The researcher made a vigilant effort to ensure the participants' safety and secure their data. The researcher completed the Human Research Subjects training (Appendix E) from CITI, which included training on ethics, assessing risk, informed consent, internet-based research, and federal regulations on research on human subjects. All participants were provided with sufficient information regarding the study. The researcher obtained the participants' agreement to participate in the study through the signed Informed Consent Form (Appendix D). Furthermore, the researcher provided a copy of the Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix C) and ensured participants knew that their participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were also notified about their right to take a break or stop the interview at any point. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that all identifiable information from the collected data was redacted to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Additionally, all related data that was collected has been stored in a locked location only accessible to the principal researcher. The records will be shredded and destroyed after 3 years of the conclusion of this study.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2013) identified three steps to processing data: (a) organizing and preparing the data, (b) reading and reviewing all of the data, and (c) coding the data into themes that form a major idea. Through this study, the researcher explored the lived experiences of 15 mid-level Student Services leaders. The researcher collected data through interviews, observations, and artifact analysis of 15 Student Services deans and directors to identify and describe the culturally responsive leadership practices they utilize in their work.

The primary form of data collection occurred via Zoom interviews with supporting data from observations and artifact examination. The interviews were semi-structured and guided by open-ended questions derived from a literature review analyzing the responsibilities of culturally responsive leaders. Additionally, the researcher had the audio recordings of the interviews transcribed by a third-party transcription service and the transcripts were shared with the interviewees to ensure accuracy. The researcher then identified the themes that emerged from the observations through detailed review of field notes and from an extensive examination of artifacts. After transcriptions of interviews, reviews of observation field notes, and examination of artifacts, the researcher developed a list of themes that emerged from the data (e.g., a theme of more professional development of staff being needed to provide deeper understanding of the cultures of the students and families that the college serves).

The researcher followed Creswell's (2013) three steps for data analysis as follows:

1. The researcher organized and prepared the data for review.
2. After organizing the data, the researcher read and reviewed all of the data. Once the data was arranged comprehensively, the researcher read, reviewed, and reflected on each data element to allow tentative patterns that emerge and begins to build the overall picture.
3. The researcher analyzed the data for common themes and proceeded to code the themes. After the themes were identified, the data was imported into NVIVO, a software utilized to code and organize the themes. Throughout the

coding process, the research question was utilized as the primary framework to ensure alignment.

After the researcher reviewed the data to determine initial themes, the researcher took approximately 10% of the data collected during the interviews, observations, and artifacts and asked a fellow doctoral researcher to code the data to ensure intercoder reliability. Through this activity, the fellow doctoral researcher confirmed the themes, trends, and frequency counts of the data collected by the primary researcher with at least 90% accuracy, thus ensuring reliability.

Limitations

Roberts (2010) defined limitations as factors that may negatively affect the results of a study but can rarely be controlled by the researcher. Even though compelling research data has been collected, it is worthwhile to acknowledge the limitations within this study. Research limitations considered by the researcher are discussed and the methods utilized to minimize those limitations are described.

The first limitation was the small sample size of 15 participants. This does not reflect the experiences of all mid-level Student Services leaders within the California Community College system and therefore cannot be generalized. To mitigate this limitation as much as possible, the researcher collected data through multiple data collection methods. The data collection methods utilized for each participant in this research study were interviews, observations, and artifacts. Due to the multiple types of data, the researcher was able to triangulate the data, thus creating greater reliability and validity with the data and findings.

The second limitation was researcher bias. With the researcher serving as the primary instrument of the research study, there is potential for research bias. To mitigate this limitation, the researcher worked with an expert panel to ensure that the interview questions aligned with the research question and the culturally relevant leadership framework (Grosland et al., 2011). Then the researcher participated in a pilot interview to ensure that the researcher's interview skills were refined. Furthermore, the researcher worked with a fellow doctoral candidate to independently code 10% of the data collected to ensure the reliability of the coding of data.

The third limitation was that the interviews were conducted online through Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There may have been some challenges, such as being unable to read body language via video conference or a participant's inexperience working with technology. To address this limitation, the researcher provided flexibility and opportunities for training. The participants were encouraged to schedule an interview date and time that was most convenient and comfortable for them. Additionally, prior to the interview, the participants were offered a one-on-one Zoom training session to build familiarity with the platform.

Summary

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to investigate the shared lived experiences of California Community College Student Services leaders and how they utilize culturally responsive leadership when leading their organizations. Chapter III presented the purpose of the study, the research question, research design, methodology, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Additionally, Chapter III identified the possible limitations of the study and the steps taken to mitigate those limitations.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

Chapter I of this dissertation introduced the topic, provided background information, and the purpose of this study. Chapter II of this research study provided a review of literature of Student Services mid-level leaders through the lens of the culturally responsive practices including the role of student services in advancing equity, the leadership structure of student services, and the critical role mid-level leaders play. Chapter III described the research methodology as qualitative, ethnographic for this research study that identifies and describes how California Community Colleges mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive in their leadership strategies with data collected through interviews and artifact collection. Chapter IV presented the findings of the study, which were based on data collected from 16 mid-level Student Services leader interviews and artifacts collected. The chapter includes detailed accounts of the participants' experiences and insights, as well as an analysis and summary of the findings.

Purpose

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to identify and describe how California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders are culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford's et al. (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework.

Research Question

How are California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford's et al. (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework?

Research Sub-Questions

Based on Horsford's et al. (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework:

1. How does one's sense of professional duty influence California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
2. How does one's personal journey influence California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
3. How does one's pedagogical approach influence California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
4. How do political contexts influence California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

A qualitative, ethnographic investigation method was chosen to examine the culturally responsive leadership strategies utilized by 16 mid-level Student Services leaders within the California community colleges. The researcher sent solicitations to

participate via California Community College listservs and emails gathered from websites targeting Student Services leaders. The first 16 Student Services mid-level leaders that reached out with an interest to participate and met the study criterion were selected to participate in this research study. Data was collected through virtual interviews and artifact examination. Through this approach, the researcher was able to identify and describe how mid-level Student Services utilize culturally responsive leadership strategies using the Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework identified by Horsford et. al (2011).

Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) define a population as a group of individuals that have meet the specified criteria and to whom we seek to generalize the results of the research study. This study investigated how California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders utilize culturally responsive leadership strategies. There are 116 California community colleges. It is estimated that there are 4 to 10 mid-level student services leaders at each community college, based on the structure and size of the college. As such, the population for this study ranges from 464 to 1160.

Sample

According to McMillian & Schumacher (2010), a sample is referred to the group of participants or subjects in a research study. Further, Cresswell (1998) explains that the sample is taken from the larger population pool thus the sample is representative of the whole population. Based on the population for this study, which is estimated at approximately 464 to 1160, a sample of 15 will be used for this study.

Sampling Procedures

Sampling procedures for this study consists of two steps. Step one of the sampling procedures involves criterion sampling. Criterion sampling, as defined by Patton (2001, p. 238), involves "selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance". To participate in the study, the participants had meet specific criterion. The criterion for participants for this study were:

- Be employed by a California Community College
- Must be a mid-level leader, usually a Dean or Director, within Student Services
- Have at least 3 years of experience as a mid-level leader

Step two of sampling procedure involves convenience sampling. Convenience sampling involves selecting subjects based on being accessible (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). In line with McMillian and Schumacher's definition of convenience sampling, the researcher interviewed the first 16 leaders that respond to the recruitment email.

Demographic Data

A sample of 16 mid-level Student Services leaders who met the criterion for this study were virtually interviewed through Zoom. Each participant signed an informed consent form and completed a demographic survey. The demographic survey collected relevant demographic information relating to the study, such as gender identity, race or ethnicity, current title, years in mid-level Student Services role, and years of experience in higher education. Participants were assigned pseudonyms and identified using numbers ranging from 1-16. Table 2 outlines the demographic data for each participant in this research study.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant Number	Gender Identity	Race/ Ethnicity	Current Title	Years in mid-level Student Services role	Years of experience in higher education
1	Female	White	Dean of Counseling Services	6	16
2	Female	Hispanic or Latina/o/x & White	Director	10	17
3	Female	Black or African-American	Assistant Director Veteran Services	3	12
4	Female	Hispanic or Latina/o/x	Dean of Student Affairs/Student Success	3.5	23
5	Female	Hispanic or Latina/o/x & White	Associate Dean, Financial Aid	20	22
6	Female	Hispanic or Latina/o/x	Director of Counseling	7	22
7	Male	Black or African-American & Hispanic or Latina/o/x	Director of Student Equity	9	17
8	Female	Hispanic or Latina/o/x	Director of Student Affairs, High School Equivalency Program	3.25	17
9	Male	Asian & Hispanic or Latina/o/x	Director, TRIO Programs	23	30

10	Female	White	DSPS Director	12	33
11	Female	Hispanic or Latina/o/x	Director of the Veterans Success Center	4	4
12	Female	Hispanic or Latina/o/x	Director of Enrollment Services, Admissions and Records and Registrar	5	17
13	Female	Hispanic or Latina/o/x	Dean of Student Services	11	40
14	Female	Hispanic or Latina/o/x	Director, Student Development	8	13
15	Female	White	Dean of Counseling	8	26
16	Male	White	Director of Veteran Services	10	20

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The findings that are presented in this chapter are the result of 16 hours of interviews and through the review of 4 artifacts. The data collected in this ethnographic study was analyzed to investigate how California community college mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford et al. (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework. The participants were interviewed between from April 1, 2022 and May 31, 2022. A total of 8 themes emerged and were organized into the following four dimensions outlined in the framework:

Dimension 1: Personal Journey

Dimension 2: Professional Duty

Dimension 3: Pedagogical Approach

Dimension 5: Political Contexts.

Analysis of Data

Through this study, the researcher explored the lived experiences of 16 mid-level Student Services leaders. The researcher collected data through virtual interviews of 16 Student Services mid-level leaders and artifact analyzation to identify and describe the culturally responsive leadership practices that they utilize in their work. The interviews were semi-structured and guided by open-ended questions derived from a literature review analyzing the responsibilities of culturally responsive leaders. Then the researcher had the audio recordings of the interviews transcribed by a third-party transcription service. The researcher then reviewed and then re-reviewed the interview transcripts and extensively examined the artifacts to determine themes. After the themes were identified, the data was imported into NVIVO which is a software that utilized to code and organize the themes. Then each of the themes were coded. Throughout the coding process, the research question was utilized as the primary framework to ensure alignment. After the researcher reviewed the data to determine themes, the researcher took approximately 10% of the data collected during the interviews and artifact collection and asked a fellow doctoral researcher to code the data to ensure intercoder reliability. Through this activity, the fellow doctoral researcher confirmed the themes, trends, and frequency counts of the data collected by the primary researcher with at least 90% accuracy thus ensuring reliability.

Figure 1 outlines the data organized by each dimension of the significant themes in this research study. The themes are the culturally responsive strategies utilized by mid-level Student Services leaders within the California community colleges.

Figure 2:

Themes by Dimension

Dimension 1: Personal Journey	**Dimension 2: Professional Duty**
Theme 1: Recognizing how their own journey has influenced them *Theme 2:* Being reflective of your own practice	*Theme 1:* Lead by example *Theme 2:* Utilize data to engage in critical analysis of processes and practices
Dimension 3: Pedagogical Approach	**Dimension 4: Political Contexts**
Theme 1: Actively engage in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion *Theme 2:* Building on the strengths of their diverse team members.	*Theme 1:* Cultivating relationships across campus *Theme 2:* Utilizing strategic allies to push forward equity initiatives.

The following table outlines each of the themes in each dimension by sources and frequency count.

Table 3

Dimension, Theme, Sources, Frequency

Dimension	Themes	Sources	Frequency
Personal Journey	Recognizing how their own journey has influenced them	16	193
Personal Journey	Reflective of their own practice	16	85
Professional Duty	Lead by example	15	91

Professional Duty	Utilize data to engage in critical analysis of processes and practices	13	55
Pedagogical Approach	Actively engage in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion	15	162
Pedagogical Approach	Building on the strengths of their diverse team members	15	72
Political Contexts	Cultivating relationships across campus	16	122
Political Context	Utilizing strategic allies to push forward equity initiatives.	16	90

Themes Based on Dimension

The following data are presented based on culturally responsive leadership strategies according to Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework's four dimensions: professional duty, personal journey, pedagogical approach, and political context. During the interviews, the participants were asked semi-structured interview questions designed around the four dimensions. After collecting and coding the data, the researcher identified themes within each of the four dimensions. Each section is organized from the highest to the lowest frequency count

Dimension 1: Personal Journey

In this dimension, the focus is on how the mid-level Student Services leader's personal journey influences their ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies. Through this dimension, the effective leader is self-reflective of their own practice, assumptions, and beliefs in serving diverse populations. In addition, there is an

assessment, acknowledgement, and resolution of the policies and procedures that create barriers for historically marginalized populations. Two major themes emerged for this dimension recognizing how one's own journey has influenced them and being reflective on their own practice (Table 4).

Table 4

Dimension 1: Personal Journey Major Themes

Dimension	Themes
Dimension 1: Personal Journey	Dimension 1 Theme 1: Recognizing how their own journey has influenced them Dimension 1 Theme 2: Reflective on your own practice

Theme 1: Recognizing how their own journey has influenced them

The research question for this research study asks how are California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford's et al. Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework (2011). More specifically for this dimension, how does the personal journey influence California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

Analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of the first theme under Dimension 1: Personal Journey. Culturally responsive mid-level Student Services leaders recognize how their own journey has influenced them. This theme had 16 sources which were identified from the semi-structured interviews, with a frequency count of 122 as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Theme, Source, and Frequency – Recognizing how one's own lived experiences have influence them

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Recognizing how one's own journey has influenced them	16	122

The early lived experiences of mid-level Student Services leaders have influenced their culturally responsive practices. Participant 2's father was Hispanic and Native American and her mother was German and Irish. Participant 2 stated that although she had some features like dimples and her nose similar to her mother, her skin tone resembled more of her father. She recalled an experience in which her mother came to pick her up at school in her elementary years and her fellow peers couldn't believe that she was her mother. Experiences like this in her early childhood made her aware of race and it played a major role in how she identified with the world. This early recognition of that she was "different" than the majority of the kids at her school brought race to her consciousness. She felt that she was treated differently by her peers as a result of her perceived identity. Participant 2 stated that these experiences make her more conscious of the complexities of identity which allows her to have a sense of awareness to avoid stereotype others based upon assumed visually apparent identities. As a result of her experiences, Participant 2 talked about openly discussing with her staff the importance of listening to the stories of students to get a better understanding of them and intersection of their identities and challenging our preconceived assumptions and beliefs.

"…just continuing to have conversations about what are the different experiences, the different identities, the different struggles that our students go through, and talking about how we can support them through those things. "

Discussing the experiences, identities and struggles of students, allows Participant 2 and her team to grow in their understanding of intersections of race, gender, and other aspects of identity.

Participant 5 also recognizes that her lived experiences in her personal journey have greatly influenced her. Participant 5 is the daughter of two first generation immigrants. She grew up in a home in which there were 3 languages spoken. Her family religious affiliation was with Eastern Greek Orthodox Christianity. Despite living in a predominately Jewish community, she felt a sense of connectedness as there seemed to be a shared understanding of the importance of community, tradition, and culture. Despite the difference in faith, she stated that she felt very connected to this community. Participant 5 attended Catholic School and she feels that the concept of serving others is deeply engrained part of who she is as a result of her experiences. While serving with humility and purpose, Participant 5 believes that another aspect another of her servant leadership is challenge the status quo. Participant 5 serves as the Director of Financial Aid at her institution. Financial aid is highly regulated so thus financial aid administrators often spend their time enforcing rules. Participant 5 challenges herself, her team, and her financial aid administrator peers across the state to challenge this sense of being neutral enforcers of rules of a system that historically been biased against marginalized students. The biases are often subtle and implicit. Implicit bias are a person's attitudes or stereotypes that affect their understanding, actions, and decisions unconsciously (Orem, 2018). These implicit biases can be built from our own lived experiences or learned through our families, friends, media, etc. Participant 5 has been a champion of recognizing the implicit bias that exists within financial aid practices and policies. She

has developed a training toolkit that challenges financial aid leaders and staff with concrete strategies to recognize and address implicit bias.

Theme 2: Reflective on their own practice

The research question for this research study asks how are California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford's et al. Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework (2011). More specifically for this dimension, how does the personal journey influence California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

Analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of the second theme under Dimension 4: Personal Journey. Culturally responsive mid-level Student are reflective of their own practice. This theme had 16 sources which were identified in the semi-structured interviews with a frequency of 90.

Table 6

Theme, Source, and Frequency – Leaning on one's values to push forth equity

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Reflective on their own practice	16	90

Mid-level Student Services leaders being reflective of their own practice includes reflecting on the decisions they have made and the interactions they have had with people across the campus community. Part of being reflective is to know your own core values and to recognize your own biases. It is also being cognizant and aware that interactions in one setting may look different and require an alternate way of advocating in other situations. This was highlighted by Participant 2. Participant 2 is a director at rural

California community college in an extremely conservative community. What was unique about her leadership dynamics is the dissonance in her extensive experience working in liberal communities and currently serving in a very conservative community. In this position, she learned quickly that she may face stereotypes of students by community members that may or may not be intentional in nature. As such, Participant 2 models being reflective to her staff and the community she serves. Even though her experiences may differ in a liberal college compared to the current rural college, she must reflect and identify ways to navigate through the community while providing opportunities for the community members to listen and learn. In the outside community setting, she was a careful listener to other points of view, while very subtly expressing her point of view, which often was not of the norm in the community group that she was conversing with. She shared that she was reflective and modeled being "conscious of not stereotyping what somebody is or what they're about because of their different apparent identities..." Participant 2 discussed a conversation happening on the college campus between two white female community members and one of them says that they "didn't buy the concept of white privilege because they grew up so poor and didn't have privilege." Participant 2 gently eased her way into the conversation and was able to have a healthy discussion with the two community members about the intersectionality of race and socioeconomic status. She shared with the community members in a kind way that you can still have racial privilege and not have socioeconomic or class privilege. Participant 2 recognized that to advocate and protect her students, she needed to be bold in her push for diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus. She shared about having two students in her program that were transgendered. She actively engaged in working with

staff to create an environment that made these two students feel cared about, accepted, and valued for who they were. She worked with her team to challenge stereotypes and assumptions. By being able to be reflective and read the environment, Participant 2 knows when she needs to push boldly and when she needs to provide a gentle nudge. By bravely talking about these stereotypes and assumptions, she led her team and her community in a culturally responsive fashion; more importantly, she felt that by reflecting on her own practice through the personal journey dimension has prepared her to help find common ground.

Dimension 2: Professional Duty

In this dimension, the focus is on the mid-level Student Services leaders sense of professional duty that has been shaped by their education, preparation, and experience. Through their sense of professional duty, the mid-level Student Services leader set impacts the culture of their department and institution, promotes social justice, dismantle barriers for student success especially students of color, and be a champion of diversity, equity, and inclusion. For this dimension, two major themes came out for this dimension: lead by example and utilizing data to engage in critical analysis of processes and practices (Table 7).

Table 7:

Dimension 2 Major Themes

Dimension	Themes
Dimension 2: Professional Duty	Dimension 2 Theme 1: Lead by Example Dimension 2 Theme 2: Utilize data to engage in critical analysis of processes and practices

Theme 1: Lead by Example

The research question for this research study asks how are California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford's et al. Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework (2011). More specifically for this dimension, how does one's sense of professional duty influence California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

Analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of the first theme under Dimension 1: Professional Duty. Culturally responsive mid-level Student Services leaders lead by example. This theme had 16 sources which were identified in the semi-structured interviews with a frequency of 193.

Table 8

Theme, Source, and Frequency – Lead by Example

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Lead by Example	15	90

During the semi structured interviews with open ended questions and the review of the artifacts, participants were asked to identify how their sense of professional duty influences their ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership. The data revealed practices and strategies Student Services mid-level leaders used to enact culturally responsive leadership within the California community colleges and the communities that they serve in. As the leaders examined their own core values, practices, and

responsibilities that shape their professional duty, they were able to share insights and strategies for culturally responsive leadership.

To be culturally responsive leaders, as respondents focused on the Professional Duty Dimension, one theme that was prominently focused on the idea that culturally responsive leaders lead by example. The data showcased 90 cases of how these leaders led by example to those that they lead. The key components of leading by example that many respondents shared was how a good leader should know their core values, model the behavior they want to see in others and fully operating from a servant mindset. When they wanted their subordinates to also be self-reflective, they modeled and demonstrated to them how they were personally self-reflective. Within the theme of lead by example, one of the key components that Student Services leaders modeled was being self-reflective of the of your own practices, values, and beliefs with your professional duty.

Modeling the behaviors that you expect for your team Being self-reflective to identify what your core values are and then choosing which battles you are willing to take on are essential components of the theme of leading by example. Participant 7 is the Director of Equity at his community college and is bi-racial being half Black and half Mexican. He oversees equity programs at a large suburban California community college. Participant 7 openly shared his points of view on issues and how speaking up about his core beliefs is important. When reflecting on why he shares openly, he stated “I have my core values and I think if it's something that was, affecting or impacting my core, then I'm going to speak up regardless of the situation.” He touched on the importance of speaking up as a way to model for others and in turn, encourage others to also speak up based on

their core beliefs. While staying grounded in core values in your daily practice is essential, participant 7 also points out that “you have to pick your battles. Furthermore, he modeled for others the idea that “you don’t want to fight everything but you don’t want to lay down and not say anything at all.” To highlight the concept of leading by example, Participant 7 also leads the African American Men’s Group, for African American students, as a way to mentor and model for students the work of advocacy for diversity and inclusion. Much of what Participant 7 shared is central to the idea that culturally responsive leaders, through their professional duty, lead by example. As identified by Participant 7, leading by example encompasses knowing your core values, identifying which battles you are willing to take on and modeling this behavior for your team.

Another component of lead by example that came through as a part of a mid-level Student Service leaders culturally responsive leadership was operating your daily practice through a servant leadership mindset in which the focus is serving others whether it be staff or students. Through this servant leadership, the focus is on shared leadership, open communication, and the development of relationships with serving others at the heart of everything the leader does. Participant 4 had a spiritual experience as a child and faith is at the foundation of her being. She believes that every person has a purpose and states that she believes her purpose is to serve others. She states “I think as a servant leader, my job is to serve. If students see me out there serving, they, they know that they can come to me and I make myself available and…..I have an open door policy if I'm here and I'm not in a meeting, my door's open, they can walk in and we can talk. Whatever task I have to get done, it will wait…..I make myself available to people, even in areas that may not be

in my jurisdiction, I will say, how can I help?" Participant 5 who serves as an Associate Dean of Financial Aid also added "servant leadership felt really natural to me, as a kind of a professional expression of faith being of service." Both participants 4 and 5 model servant leadership which seeks out to connect with students and staff to their teams and across campus.

Through this servant leadership mindset, dialogue and listening, it builds a safe place for diverse students, staff, and community members. It also builds greater leadership capacity amongst mid-level Student Services leaders to serve diverse students, staff, and communities in a culturally responsive manner. Through this modeling and functioning of service through the servant leadership mindset, mid-level Student Service leaders seek to listen, learn, and understand the journeys of their students, staff, and community members to be culturally responsive in their professional duty.

Theme 2: Utilize data to engage in critical analysis of processes and practices.

Analysis of the data indicated the emergence of a second theme of utilizing data to engage in critical analysis of process and practices to be culturally responsive in the mid-level Student Services leaders sense of professional duty. This theme was found in 16 sources, of which 14 were semi-structured interviews and 2 were artifacts, and had a frequency of 85.

Table 9

Theme, Source, and Frequency – Utilize data to engage in critical analysis of process and practices

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Utilize data to engage in critical analysis of processes and practices	16	85

As advocates for their students and staff, culturally responsive mid-level Student Services leaders utilize data in critical analyses of processes and practices as a part of their professional duty to be champions of equity. One of the major areas that mid-level Student Services leaders utilize data for is the critical analysis of process and practices in hiring practices. It is essential that the staff and faculty in higher education be representative of the diverse students that they serve. Based upon the Vision for Success – Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Taskforce (2020) report, one of areas identified based upon data across the whole California Community College system, the faculty and staff diversification is not in alignment with student diversification. This points to an intentional focus needing to be placed on hiring practices. This concept of using data to critically analyze and intentionally focus on hiring practices to ensure the staff and faculty hired were of the same or similar race and/or ethnicity of the students they served as a part of culturally responsive strategies that the participants utilize in their professional duty. In other words, these participants were suggesting that representation matters.

Participant 1 comes from a background that is very different than the students she serves. Participant 1 reported that she is serving at an institution where more than 70% of the students are students of color, mainly Latinx. Participant 1 is a white female that came from an extremely privileged background. She stated that she walked away from her family and their wealth because she wanted to work in education and support students who didn't come from a background like hers. Despite coming from a background that is very different than her students, Participant 1 understands the importance of diverse students seeing faculty, staff, and administrators that look like them. She feels that as a

culturally responsive mid-level Student Services leader that it is a part of her professional duty to utilize data to critically analyze the hiring process and ensure that it results in the employment of diverse staff that come from the same culture as her students. She states that "I actively recruit groups of people who represent our students in ethnic and cultural diversity."

Participant 1 not only spoke about hiring diverse staff from a pool of qualified applicants, but she also took an active approach to encourage and support diverse staff in growing within the organization. She has developed a pipeline of hiring within the institution. In her interview, she talked about identifying classified staff, especially those from a similar background as the students, that have the passion and potential to be excellent counselors. She discussed supporting and encouraging those staff members to enroll in a program that helps them pursue their counseling degree and then providing them growth opportunities within the institution. She called it "having a pipeline of counselors". She mentioned not only being supportive but taking concrete actions like adjustment of work schedule so that these staff members can attend school. Her rationale was that the current employees already understand the institution and the students served. Additionally, she strongly felt that institutions need to encourage the people within the institution that have a similar culture to the students, that care deeply about students, and have the skill sets needed to grow within positions across the college. This pipeline of growing diverse classified staff is one strategy Participant 1 developed after critically analyzing data to drive hiring processes as a culturally responsive leader. Developing and providing avenues for diverse staff to learn and grow within the institution in another way Participant 1 ensures hiring process is more inclusive.

Participant 8 runs an adult education program that supports mostly migrant workers in attaining their high school diploma and beyond. She is Latinx herself as are most of the students and community that she serves. Even though she was born in the United States, her family moved back to Mexico when she was very young. She and her family immigrated back to the United States when she was 14 years old. Participant 8 had to begin school in the United States as an English as a Second Language (ESL) student to learn English. She was a first-generation college student herself. Her experiences are very similar to her students and a most of the community she serves. As a culturally responsive mid-level Student Services leader that is consistently analyzing data on processes and practices to ensure student centered practices as a part of her professional duty, she also echoed the importance of hiring people that look like their students, much like Participant 1 stated. Furthermore, she stated that not only do they need to have the same or similar culture but that it was pivotal that they "speak the language and know their community." As part of their professional duty, Mid-level Student Services leaders regularly utilize data to critically analyze the hiring process among their teams to ensure a diverse staff that is representative of the diverse students and communities they serve.

Another common part of utilizing data to engage in critical analysis of processes and practices strategy that was brought up by the culturally responsive Student Services mid-level leaders is to actively engage in cross functional discussions that analyze the data to identify what is happening in the classroom. They employ this as a part of their professional duty to address the achievement gaps between white students and students of color. What is happening in the classroom is just as essential as the services provided under the umbrella of Student Services. As a part of their professional duty, culturally

responsive mid-Student Services leaders play a critical role in these discussions as this is the intersection of instruction and student services. As an advocate for the diverse students that they serve, the culturally responsive mid-level Student Services leader has an inherent obligation as a part of their professional duty to actively engage in the utilization of data to critically analyze processes and practices, including what is happening in the classroom to address achievement gaps and to deploy best practices.

Participant 15 currently serves as a Dean of Counseling at a California community college and has a significant research background in serving diverse students and communities. She is passionate about utilizing data to critically analyze processes and practices as a part of her professional duty to identify gaps and best practices in serving students especially marginalized students. She consistently looks for identified best practices not only at her college but at other colleges. Participant 15 stated that she is bringing a strategy used at her sister college to her college, which will utilize data to review practices in the classroom. At that particular college, they looked at student success data for individual classes and academic programs. Participant 15 stated "they broke those down by individual professors and then data within the individual class". The data that was looked at was not only the success rate but who was taking the class and who wasn't. Participant 15 provided an example in which in one of the courses 50% of the students that took the course were Asian but only 20% of the students on the campus were Asian and yet there no black students enrolled in this class even though 14% percent of the student population was black. The questions are not just focused on who is or is not succeeding in each class and each program but also who is signing up for the course. Why are the black students not taking this particular course? Why are the

Asian students signing up at higher rates for this particular course? This data is then analyzed by a cross functional group that included mid-level Student Services leader to develop strategies to address achievements and participation gaps of marginalized students based upon the findings at the granular level. The culturally responsive Student Services leader, as a part of their professional duty, work collaboratively to utilize data to analyze practices in the classroom to identify and address equity gaps in achievement.

Dimension 3: Pedagogical Approach

In this dimension, the focus is on the mid-level Student Services leaders pedagogical approach and how it influences their ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies. Through the integration of culturally relevant and antiracist practices, the culturally responsive mid-level Student Service leaders utilize the pedagogical approach to serve diverse students, staff and communities. For this dimension, two major themes emerged for this dimension: actively engaging in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion and building-up people (Table 10).

Table 10

Dimension 3: Pedagogical Approach Major Themes

Dimension	Themes
Dimension 3: Pedagogical Approach	Dimension 3 Theme 1: Actively engage in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Dimension 3 Theme 2: Building on the strengths of their diverse team members.

Theme 1: Actively engage in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The research question for this research study asks how are California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford's et al. Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework (2011). More specifically for this dimension, how does the pedagogical approach influence California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

Analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of the first theme under Dimension 3: Pedagogical Approach. Culturally responsive mid-level Student Service leaders actively engage in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. This theme had 15 sources that emerged from the semi-structured interviews with a frequency of 172.

Table 11

Theme, Source, and Frequency – Actively engage in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Actively engage in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion	15	172

During the semi structured interviews with open ended questions, mid-level Student Services leaders identified the first theme within the pedagogical approach dimension as actively engaging in conversations focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion. One of the components of actively engaging in in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion in the pedagogical approach as expressly shared by participants 1, 5, 7, 13, and 15 was having timely opportunities for professional development. The focus of the professional development is on issues related to diversity,

equity, and inclusion. Participant 7 who is the Director of Equity at a California community college captured this idea when he said

"I think the first thing is just take an inventory of everyone and see where they are culturally and bring in professionals either from the district or from the college. Kind of grasp where their understanding is. But I'm a firm believer of professional development and providing every key player an opportunity to grow professionally in any area that they choose in this area in particular. So we've sent groups of folks to the Haku conference that cater to Hispanic students, the A2Mend conference that focus on black men. Um, and through those two conferences that are typically are signature conferences that are, that cost a pretty penny to send people. We bring them back and have a debrief and start looking at how we can implement some of the best practices that they've learned in those conferences and how we can apply some of those things in our work that we do in and out of the classroom, as well as the students that we send to these conferences as well on how they learn. So they can become student leaders and help us peer to peer connect with the students, as well as a more culturally responsive in our community and at our institution"

Participant 7 discussed it was important to "take an inventory" which is to know and understand where your staff and faculty are currently in terms of culturally responsive practices and identify the growth opportunities. Then to actively continue the conversation and growth on diversity, equity, and inclusion, it is essential to provide targeted professional development growth opportunities for your team. Participant 7 further stated that working with your team, a leader can identify "signature conferences" which are conferences that have a deep focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion that occur on a regular basis, are an example of professional development that can be utilized to provide growth for their team members. Participant 7 then has a debrief with the team members that attend the conference and collaboratively identifies the best practices learned and how those practices can be applied in their work. One example that Participant 7 provided during the interview was having instructional faculty conduct curriculum audits after professional development on the topic to ensure the required

curriculum is inclusive of diverse voices. Participant 7 additionally utilized this model of professional development and growth opportunities not only for staff but also with student leaders. This equipped team members and student leaders to also be more culturally responsive in their practice in their work at the institution but also their community.

Participant 13 further expanded of her utilization of the strategy to actively engage in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion through targeted professional development by setting it as a goal within staff evaluations. She also states that there must be a commitment from her and the institution through the dedication of monies for professional development.

> "It's something that the commitment's there for professional development, the dollars are there, and the opportunities are there. When I meet with them to establish their employee goals for evaluation, I always ask them to consider a goal that looks at, the meaning our DEI requirements. I always just tell them to pick a goal towards DEI to ensure that, you're working towards equity for students and services."

Through dedicated funding for professional development from the institution for diversity, equity, and inclusion, it ensures there are opportunities for staff to attend and learn. Tying it to the evaluation process allows for individual conversations around equity, diversity and inclusion. It also ensures that there is active, ongoing engagement, focus, and growth in areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion. In further conversations, Participant 13 sets the foundation of having staff bringing back learnings from professional development and sharing them together with the team. This provides an opportunity for the team and the department to learn from each other. Through this process, Participant 13 and her team are committing to ongoing and continual growth by

actively engaging in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion withing the pedagogical approach dimension.

Theme 2 Building on the strengths of their diverse team members

Analysis of the data indicated the emergence of a second theme of building on the strengths of their diverse team members in the pedagogical approach dimension used by mid-level Student Services leaders to be culturally responsive. This theme was found in 15 sources and had a frequency of 77.

Table 12

Theme, Source, and Frequency – Building up people

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Building on the strengths of their diverse team members	15	77

During semi structured interviews with open ended questions, mid-level Student Services leaders identified the second theme within their culturally responsive practices in the pedagogical approach is building on the strengths of their diverse team.

One of the components of building on the strengths of their diverse team within the pedagogical approach is to build leadership capacity within the team as indicated by Participants 1, 2,3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, and 15. This building of leadership capacity can be built through ongoing learning and engagement, both on and off campus. Participant 1 started out as a counselor and then became an administrator. She grew in leadership and now serves as the Dean of Student Services. She builds the leadership capacity of her team by identifying classified staff with leadership potential, encouraging them to pursue their education, being flexible in scheduling to allow them the opportunity to attend school, and providing them opportunities to become faculty members. Participant 1 stated

that to identify leaders amongst her team, she spent a lot of time relationship building and getting to know her team. Identifying and building up people already working at the college who have the leadership skills to is a positive step because they would be aware of the college process, procedures, resources, and have a firm understanding of the student population as well as the community. Through this process, Participant 1 also shared that it allows for her to identify team members that are representative of the marginalized populations that they serve. The staff members would already have the buy in of the staff and faculty because they are a known figure. Participant 1 states:

"..most recent group of counselors to get tenure, one was an admissions and records specialists. Another was an admissions and records technician. Another was an outreach specialist. I've got two that just got hired full time that were both outreach specialists. I've got one who was a classified staff member in DSPS for 10 years. So, it's creating a culture that, that brings folks up who have the experiences of our students and, are also reflective, ethnically and racially of our students and our community, because they are our community. We also bring people in from the outside when they've got something to contribute. They have the skill that we need."

Through education components and providing opportunities to grow, staff build greater leadership capacity. It also provides staff members who are representative of the marginalized communities of the students to have opportunities and encouragement to grow in their roles. This practice encourages also promotes hiring more faculty members that are representative of the students they serve.

Participant 8 builds the leadership capacity of her team within the building up people theme in a different way than Participant 1. While Participant 1 grows her people by encouraging them to seek higher education and then grow into faculty roles, Participant 8 pushes her team to actively learn about the students and communities they serve by immersing themselves in it. Participant 8 oversees a team and program that serves adult learners in her community who are often seasonal migrant workers and

assists them with obtaining their high diploma. Most of the students in her programs come from a Latinx background who are often first-generation immigrants with Spanish being their native language. Participant 8 immerses herself within the community she serves and encourages her staff to do the same. She continually reminds herself and her team of the contributions of this population which is often overlooked with the literal food on the table that they eat at home. Participant 8 states that:

"… the program that I lead, serves seasonal, migrant farm workers in our community. I feel, um, a duty of our profession and also a duty of us as community members. to look after the people who actually provide us with our food, ensuring that they have the same rights and to an education and the same access to an education as everybody else. It's the key to the success of our community. This individual lives here, their children will be raised in this community. They will become active members of our society. They will become voting members of our society just as I am. And, they will be making decisions for my future… it important that we look at it through this lens."

Participant 8 consistently encourages her team to interview the students within their program and learn about their life. In addition, Participant 8 encourages her staff to go into the community and connect with them to learn about their life. It provides for authentic learning moments which then enhance the leadership capacity of her team to serve a culturally diverse student body.

Developing leadership capacity to building people up not only applies to staff but also to students. Participant 7 is a Director of Equity at his college and leads multiple student leadership groups focused on building the leadership capacity of marginalized populations by providing real world experiences. This is done in multiple ways throughout the college. Through a product called Career Launch, students are provided opportunity to recognize and develop "soft skills" such as communication skills, teambuilding, teamwork, problem solving, etc. The students are provided group coaching sessions to discuss the learning and provide opportunities for students to further learn the

application of the soft skills. Then students are provided a 60-day internship that provides them an opportunity to apply the leadership skills they have learning and apply them in real world employment.

Another element of the building on the strengths of their diverse team members theme, within the pedagogical approach dimension, is to build safe spaces for students and staff as shared by Participants 1,2, 4, 6, 7, 10, and 11. Through building these safe spaces, just in time intervention and support can be provided. Participant 7 is a Director of Equity at his college. He discussed the importance of building a safe space for marginalized students. This is a space for marginalized students to have their own space on campus to gather, utilize resources, and build community. Participant 7 stated that: "…in those two equity lounges, they'll be a hangout space. They'll have a place that they can call home. They'll have computers study space, just relax to kind of just know that this is a place that they can hold meetings, club meetings, etc. for just camaraderie and just peer to peer activities."

It would be a specified space for learning, community building, and developing a sense of belonging for marginalized populations of students. It additionally allows for just in time support for the highest at-risk students. Furthermore, in this space, mentorship can be provided by staff and faculty to provide just in support and assistance for students.

Participant 4 shared about building a safe space for staff and faculty to have difficult conversations. She shared about how sometimes changing the actual physical location and set-up of the seating within a meeting can change the sense of safe space within a meeting. Participant 4 shared that she came into a space that had toxic staff meetings. Staff members would yell at each within the meeting which created fear and a

sense of uncomfortableness. Participant 4 noted that the space for the meeting allowed people to "hide" when yelling profanities as their peers. She stated:

"…there used to be a time when this group would yell at each other, even profanities, this group would be terrible with each other so much so that when I came in, people were afraid to go to meetings because how ugly it would, it would get. I have had so many people now come to me saying like, those meetings are so different. The very first thing I did when we, when I came in, was not meet in the room when they had been meeting for years with the attacks. So one of the strategies was get a different room, even though they were complaining, that's not the room we meet in. I said, that's okay. That other room doesn't have the title such and such meeting. We moved to a larger space. I had facilities set up a circle of chairs because they used to meet And so I opened up the space and I had everybody sit in a circle. And even when people came in and tried to sit outside the circle, I would say, no, no, you have to get in the middle of circle. And we met that way for almost a year in a circle. "

To change this atmosphere and start creating a safe space for all staff, the first thing that Participant 4 changed was the location and the actual seating setup of the meeting room. By having people face each other and not hide, it created a space of accountability for what was being said. Participant 4 talked about how the simple change of location and seating arrangements and modeling healthy and appropriate boundaries for discussion helped to change the toxic environment to a more of a healthier safe space. She stated "Hard conversations, showing respect, making sure that there's always respect in the room. I try and lead by example so that I give people respect and I give people space." Through the mentoring, accountability, and modeling of this leadership, Participant 4 challenged the norms of the previous staff meetings to push her staff to grow in their leadership capacity and build on the strengths of her diverse team member within the pedagogical approach dimension which resulted in the building of a space for her staff to share their ideas and thoughts.

Dimension 4: Political Context

In this dimension, the focus is on the mid-level Student Services leader's ability to navigate the often highly contentious political contexts to bravely move the needle forward on student success especially of marginalized populations. Through the political context, the culturally responsive Student Services mid-level leaders must not only be capable of administering all state, district, and college policies and procedures but also be able to understand and critically analyze the political perspectives that frame such policies and practices. Two major themes were evident for this dimension: cultivating relationships across campus and utilizing strategic allies to push forward equity initiatives (Table 13).

Table 13

Dimension 4 Major Themes

Dimension	Themes
Dimension 4: Political Context	Dimension 4: Theme 1: Cultivating relationships across campus. Dimension 4: Theme 2: Utilizing strategic allies to push forward equity initiatives.

Theme 1: Cultivating relationships across the campus community

The research question for this research study asks how are California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford's et al. Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework (2011). More specifically for this dimension, how do political contexts influence California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

Analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of the first theme under Dimension 2: Political Context. Culturally responsive mid-level Student Services cultivate relationships across the campus community. This theme aligned with 15 sources from the semi-structured interviews with a frequency of 91.

Table 14

Theme, Source, and Frequency – Cultivating relationships across the campus community

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Cultivating relationships across the campus community	15	91

During the semi structured interviews with open ended questions, mid-level Student Services leaders were asked to identify how the political context influences their ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership. The data revealed practices and strategies mid-level Student Services leaders used to enact culturally responsive leadership within the California community colleges and the communities that they serve in to navigate the political contexts. Culturally responsive mid-level Student Services intentionally cultivate relationships across the campus as a part of their political contexts to develop trust and allies. This is done through honest and transparent conversation amongst their teams and across the campus. The mid-level Student Services leaders' personal life experiences may differ than the students and staff that they serve but through the utilization of honest and transparent conversations, leaders can cultivate relationships amongst their team and across campus that are powerful to move the needle forward on serving marginalized students in culturally responsive ways. This was highlighted through by the experience of Participant 1. Participant 1 comes from a very affluent and privileged background and grew up not having to worry about the needs that

typical community college students might have. During the interview, she reflected on her desire to serve and how she walked away from her affluent life to dedicate her life to public education and lift up marginalized populations that did not have the same opportunities as her. Recognizing that she had a very different upbringing than that of the students she serves, she is intentional in her efforts to navigate the political climate of the college by cultivating relationships across the campus community. Her approach first begins with having honest, transparent, and ongoing communication with her counseling team. She discussed how she has a weekly meeting with her team of counselors in which they have open conversations about equity and student success. She stated:

"You've got to be honest with the counselors…..I provide a lot of opportunity for communication inside of the department. We meet weekly as a counseling department with all counselors across the entire college……every week we meet and bring up issues that our students have faced, in order to move forward. And in doing that, we've got this sort of culture of speaking and debating respectfully…… Don't hold back but do it professionally.

Not only does Participant 1 encourage her team to discuss freely, she actually encourages them to not "hold back". It is evident that her insistence on not holding back is a key element of how she is a culturally responsive leader. Participant 1 further explains that as her team differentiates the services for their students, it is also important to be mindful of how these individual services also play into a larger set of needs across the college. In her interview, she explains the following:

"…the hard part is that we have a tendency to ignore the big picture and focus on the little one. We love the anecdote. We love the last student we talked to. The one student who, who stood out. We don't spend too much time trying to understand the data that describes the whole student body…. We are every single student at this college. And we are never going to provide E O P S service to every single student in this college. So what do we provide to every single student? So focusing, looking at the data, trying to organize our department in a way that allows us to focus on equity, this is the way that I led the conversation with us."

This approach to focus on the current needs of the students while being mindful of the bigger picture of student success is a unique approach to using data to engage with the larger campus community. As such, her attempt to engage the larger college community, affords her the ability to engage with, and solicit help, from other divisions of the college. This approach, while unique to Participant 1, is one of many examples of how mid-level leaders are culturally responsive in the political dimension.

Through honest, transparent, and ongoing communication, Participant 1 worked collaboratively with her counseling team to figure out how work time can be reshuffled to provide counselors more time to provide counseling and support to students instead of information giving. She worked with her team to determine which of their activities were information giving that take a significant amount of time versus providing counseling services to students. The team further considered if the information giving components could be delivered in a different more time efficient way. The counseling team identified working with individual students on education plans as information giving and taking a significant amount of time. Working collaboratively with the counseling team, Participant 1 developed and executed the plan of education plans being done in a lab where groups of students would meet with a counselor to develop comprehensive education plans instead meeting with a counselor individually. In addition to the labs, short videos were developed by the counseling team to guide students on how they can begin creating their education plan prior to the lab time. It equips the students with the knowledge and understanding of essential components of their education plan because they actively engage with creating it and being empowered with knowledge to understand the requirements. Through utilize this method, it frees up time on counselor calendars to

provide targeted intervention and support to marginalized populations. In 4 hours, 50 students can complete their education plan and have a counselor review it through this method whereas this would have required 25 hours of counselor appointments time in the old model. As a result of this model, counselors were able to provide more outreach and support to marginalized populations, like undocumented students. Like Participant 1 within the political contexts, culturally responsive mid-level Student Services leaders can cultivate relationships across the campus through honest, transparent, and ongoing communication.

Another component utilized by culturally responsive mid-level Student Services leaders to cultivate relationships across the campus community in the political context is to provide intentional social opportunities for students, staff, faculty, and leadership to connect. Participant 3 is a veteran and serves as the Director of Veteran Services at a California community college. She is a female African American mid-level Student Service leader and referred to herself as a "senior citizen". Participant 3 described herself growing up very poor in the projects of Los Angeles which was ravaged by crime and poverty. She stated that she was in the Watts Riots of 1965. Participant 3 stated "most people of color and people who have been historically not the people in power and disenfranchised understand equity in our soul…. because we've dealt with being the outsider and having to navigate both the world that we have been born into and the world that controls society and what we all endeavor to do and be." She joined the armed services to provide opportunity for herself to grow and to serve her country. Participant 3 stated that the veteran population on a college campus has its own unique culture. To cultivate relationships across the campus community, Participant 3 provides intentional

social opportunities for students, staff, faculty, and leadership to connect with the veteran students through various food events hosted by the Veteran Resource Center. Participant 3 stated that the Veterans Resource Center will get food donated and then will host barbeques with an open invite to the rest of the campus community. Participant 3 also shared that the Veteran Resource Center hosts potlucks throughout the year and engage the rest of the students, faculty, staff, and leaders to participate. It's an opportunity to connect, share ideas, and build bridges across the campus community. Participant 3 said "I always think of my grandmother as she said food levels all playing fields. And it brings everybody to the table and it is a lovely way to bring people together." Such events provide an intentional social non-pressurized environment to cultivate relationships across the campus community in a political context for the culturally responsive mid-level Student Services leader and their team.

Theme 2 Utilizing strategic allies to push forward equity initiatives.

Analysis of the data indicated the emergence of a second theme of utilizing strategic allies to push forward equity initiatives in the political context dimension used by mid-level Student Services leaders to be culturally responsive. This theme was found in 13 sources and had a frequency of 55.

Table 15

Theme, Source, and Frequency – Utilizing strategic allies to push forward equity initiatives

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Utilizing strategic allies to push forward equity initiatives	13	55

During semi structured interviews with open ended questions, mid-level Student Services leaders identified the second theme within their culturally responsive practices in the political context as utilizing strategic allies to push forward equity initiatives.

One of the ways that culturally responsive mid-level Student Services leaders build strategic allies in order to utilize them to push forward equity initiatives in the political context is to identify and know the strengths of people across the campus community. Participant 4 is Latinx and has a deep sense to her purpose to bring positive change on her campus due to her deep seeded religious faith. She states that she has a positive demeanor due to her deep-seeded faith. She also states that she is purposeful in her identification of strengths in her team and her colleagues across campus. Participant 4 said:

"I think I'm pretty good at figuring out people's strengths. I'm pretty good at like discerning what and where people are, what they will be good at and I play to their strengths. So I will again, individually go to someone and say, Hey, you're really good at this and I need your help in this. I need your, your particular expertise and it's not a lie. It's totally true. They really are good at it. And then I pulled them into that particular strategy or that particular group that needs to work on that area in order to help move it forward. And because they're good at it because they're passionate about it, they do way better than I ever could and they help lead things forward. "

Participant 4 is observant and seeks to know the strengths of her team and her colleagues She is able to identify the strengths through her experiences and observations of her team and colleagues across the campus. She also makes time to converse with people across the campus and get to know them and to better understand their passions and strengths along with building a relationship with them. Participant 4 intentionality seeks to know and understand the strengths and passions of her colleagues. She then taps into this passion and strengths to intentionally move forward equity initiatives. Through this practice, she is able to build allies across the campus community in the political context.

An example provided by Participant 4 of utilizing strategic allies to move forward equity initiative on her campus was in the implementation of AB 705 which required California community colleges to eliminate placement testing and required the utilization of self-reported information such as high school grades and grade point average for placement in English and Math courses by Fall 2019. Research showed that students of color were disproportionately impacted by the utilization of placement tests (Cuellar-Mejia et al, 2016). Through AB 705, all students would have the option to enroll in transfer level math and English courses. Participant 4 talked about the resistance, especially from the math department, who was concerned that the elimination of the placement tests would result in high levels of student failures in courses. Participant 4 decided to utilize strategic allies to push forward this equity initiative:

"I picked some of the top leaders that really were respected in the math, English and counseling departments. And I brought them together as kind of a dry run. Because it's the faculty that needed to get on board with it. I said you three faculty are really good at this, have strengths in this area, and I'm going to pull you in to do this particular work to lead this effort. And it was probably one of the smoother transitions because it was led by the faculty with people who were passionate and respected, who had gifts in that area. And it did not take too much effort from me except kind of like, hey guide us here or let's meet or what's going to pushing it along. This worked really well. I try to find people yeah who will be leaders in those areas."

She intentionally tapped into seasoned and well respect math, English, and counseling faculty that were passionate about moving the college forward with AB 705 who had the strength and skill to navigate through difficult conversations. Participant 4 allowed them to be in the driver's seat to move the initiative forward which allowed for an easier transition for the whole college. The utilization of strategic allies is a way that culturally responsive mid-level Student Services leaders can be successful in moving forward equity initiatives.

Another example of the utilization of strategic allies to push forward equity initiatives was shared by Participant 7. Participant 7, who is bi-racial and identifies as both Mexican and Black, serves as a Director of Equity. He runs a men of color leadership group that supports male students of color, and he illustrated the same concept of finding people with strengths that could be utilize to build strategic allies to push forward equity initiatives in the political context:

"It's about getting alliances and champions that, that can speak and connect with people that you might not be able to connect with because of that, the differences of culture or, or gender, or what have you, um, I think is one way of, of doing that, but also knowing that you support them in their work as well. It's a give and take as well."

Participant 7 provided the example of the campus Teaching Men and Women of Color (TMWOC) to push forward equity initiatives. The TMWOC is made up of teaching faculty of color. Participant 7 identified key people within the TMWOC to push forward various equity initiatives in various political contexts. Through the identification of strengths of people across the campus, mid-level Student Services leaders utilize strategic allies to push forward equity initiatives in the political context

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONLCUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to identify and describe the lived experiences of California community college financial aid leaders as it relates to how they are culturally responsive in their leadership strategies using Horsford et al. (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership framework's four dimensions: professional duty, personal journey, pedagogical approach, and political context.

The population for this research study was mid-level Student Services leaders within California community colleges. There are 116 California community colleges. It is estimated that there are 4 to 10 mid-level student services leaders at each community college, based on the structure and size of the college. As such, the population for this study ranges from 464 to 1160. To participate in the study, the participants had to meet specific criterion. The criterion for participants for this study are as follows:

- Be employed by a California Community College
- Must be a mid-level leader, usually a Dean or Director, within Student Services
- Have at least 3 years experience as a mid-level leader

Based on the population for this study, which was estimated at approximately 464 to 1160, a sample of 16 were used for this study.

Major Findings

In this research study, California community colleges Student Services mid-level leaders shared their lived experiences and the culturally responsive leadership strategies they

utilize based upon the Horsford, et. al. Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework (2011), The researcher made the following major findings:

Dimension 1: Personal Journey

Research Sub-question: How does one's personal journey influence California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

Major Finding I: Mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they recognize how one's own journey has influenced them. In the investigation into how mid-level Student Service Leaders are culturally responsive when they leaned on their personal journey, it was apparent that this theme was prominent with 16 out of 16 (100%) of the participants noted this concept 193 times. By being aware of your own experiences and how they have influenced you, creates a higher level of self-awareness. It also allows you to identify your values, beliefs, and biases. One of the many examples can be seen in the response of Participant 2 who recognized that experiences in her early childhood made her aware of race and it played a major role in how she identified with the world. As such, she was very mindful of how past personal experiences have a direct influence on the manner in which her team functions today.

Major Finding 2: Mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they are reflective of their own practice. Through semi-structured interviews, all 16 (100%) mid-level Student Services leaders that participated in this research study reported that being reflective of their own practice is a strategy they utilize to be culturally responsive within the personal journey dimension. Understanding your core

values as well as being able to courageously identify and address biases and assumptions are key factors to being reflective practitioners.

Dimension II: Professional Duty

Research Sub-question: How does one's sense of professional duty influence California Community College Student Services mid-level leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

Major Finding 3: Mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they lead by example. Fifteen of the sixteen (94%) mid-level Student Services leaders reported being culturally responsive when they led by example within the professional duty dimension. Leading from a perspective of servant leadership was important to the mid-level Student Services leaders. Through this servant leadership, the focus is on shared leadership, open communication, and development of relationships with serving others at the heart of everything the leader does.

Major Finding 4: Mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they utilize data to engage in critical analysis of processes and practices. Fourteen of the sixteen mid-level Student Services leaders with a frequency of eighty-five reported that they utilize data to engage in critical analysis of processes and practices as a culturally responsive strategy within the professional duty dimension. Utilizing data to examine key practices and processes through the lens of equity such as hiring and student success are key to building a more inclusive culture.

Dimension III: Pedagogical Approach

Research Sub-question: How does one's pedagogical approach influence California community college Student Services mid-level leader's ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

Major Finding 5: Mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they actively engage in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Through semi structured interviews, 15 of the 16 (94%) mid-level Students Services leaders reported that actively engaging in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion is a culturally responsive leadership strategy within the pedagogical approach dimension. Working collaboratively with their team members and through conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion, mid-level Student Services leaders can identify, mid-level Student Services leaders can identify and prioritize targeted equity based professional development growth opportunities for their team members.

Major Finding 6: Mid-level Student Service leaders are culturally responsive when they build on the growth of their diverse team members. Fifteen of the sixteen of the mid-level Student Services leader participants for this research study reported that one culturally responsive strategy that they utilize within the pedagogical approach dimension is to build on the growth of their team members. Mid-level Student Services leaders build on growth of their team members by encouraging the development of each team member's leadership capacity. The growth of leadership capacity is done by providing safe space for essential dialogue, promoting opportunities for growth, and encouraging team members to pursue educational goals.

Dimension IV: Political Context

Research Sub-question: How do political contexts influence California community college mid-level Student Services leaders' ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

Major Finding 7: Mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they actively cultivate relationships across campus in pursuit of greater student outcomes for marginalized students. Fifteen of the sixteen (94%) participants in this study reported that a culturally responsive strategy that they utilize within the political context dimension is to actively cultivate relationships across campus. This strategy is done with open, honest, and ongoing dialogue with staff members across the campus. Mid-level Student Services leaders intentionally seek out to build relationships across the campus for positive outcomes for students.

Major Finding 8: Mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they utilize strategic allies to push forward equity initiatives. In this study, 13 of the 16 (81%) participants emphasized the need for mid-level Student Services leaders to collaborate and build allies across the campus to push forward equity initiatives in the political context dimension. Mid-level Student Services leaders do this by identifying the strengths of various people and departments across the campus and in the community. By building allies across the campus, mid-level Student Services leaders work collaboratively to push forward greater access to services and can push together on equity related issues.

Unexpected Findings

In addition to the eight major findings associated with this study, there was one unexpected finding. Based on the data collected, the unexpected finding revealed that mid-level Student Services leaders utilize culturally responsive leadership strategies within the personal journey dimension with a higher frequency rate of 32% compared to the other dimensions. The personal journey dimension represents how a leader's own journey impacts their practice (Horsford et al., 2011).

Conclusions

This study explored how California community college mid-level Student Services are culturally responsive in their leadership strategies. Based on the research findings of this ethnographic study, the researcher drew eight conclusions that provided more profound insight into the findings of the study.

Conclusion 1: Regular audits of Student Services processes and practices are essential to ensure continual improvement in servicing diverse student populations.

This study investigated the culturally responsive leadership practices utilized by mid-level Student Services leaders. A majority of the mid-level Student Services leaders reported using the culturally responsive strategy of utilizing data to engage in critical analysis of process and practices. Thirteen of the participants in this study reported that it was part of their professional duty to have a thorough understanding of the experience of marginalized students in the student journey especially in accessing and utilizing services in the departments that they supervise. Based on the finding that mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when utilize data to engage in critical analysis of processes and practices, it can be concluded that regular audits of such

processes and practices are essential to ensure continual improvement in servicing diverse populations.

Conclusion 2: Orienting services through the lens of servant leadership ensures that customer service to diverse students is at the heart of all services provided.

Fifteen of the sixteen mid-level Student Services leaders that participated in this research study indicated that leading by example is a culturally responsive leadership strategy they often utilize. Servant leaders strive to serve, teach, and empower others to grow (Spears, 1996). As such, mid-level leaders model the leadership and servant leadership principles that they seek in staff and peers in their service to students. It is important for the mid-level Student Services to know the functions of front-line staff, understand the diverse student's journey, model servant leadership, and have opportunities for coaching staff. Based on the finding that mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they lead by example, it can be concluded orienting services through the lens of servant leadership ensures that culturally responsive customer service to diverse students is at the heart of all services provided.

Conclusion 3: Ongoing relevant diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development on best practices is necessary.

Mid-level Student Services leaders reported the importance of a continual focus on professional development on best practices in serving marginalized students is essential to the continual growth of individuals and the college. Brunson (2020) found that professional development with informal learning opportunities through communities of practice assisted with the development of leadership capacity. By having opportunities to collaborate with peers across the California community colleges and learn about best

practices in serving marginalized students, it provides a practical opportunity for professional development and building of leadership capacity. Based on the finding that mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they actively engage in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion, it can be concluded that ongoing relevant diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development on best practices is necessary.

Conclusion 4: Allies and partnerships across the campus community can be leveraged to meet the basic needs of marginalized students.

This research study sought to answer the research question of the culturally responsive strategies utilized by mid-level Student Services leaders across California community college. In order to push forward equity initiatives, mid-level Student Services leaders must build partnerships and allies across the campus. These allies and partnerships can be leveraged to collaborate on meeting the basic needs of marginalized students. Based on the finding that mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they utilize strategic allies to push forward equity initiatives, it can be concluded that these allies and partnerships across the campus community can be leveraged to meet the basic needs of marginalized students.

Conclusion 5: To build an environment that engages and meets the needs of diverse students and staff, mid-level Student Services leaders must set aside time to reflect on their decisions and interactions.

Most of the mid-level Student Services leaders that participated in this research study reported that one of the culturally responsive leadership strategies that they utilized is to be reflective of their own practice. As a result, it is concluded that to build an

environment that engages and meet the needs of diverse students and staff, mid-level Student Services leaders must set aside time to reflect on the decision and interactions of the day. Allocating specific time on their calendar and then journaling their reflections will be essential to the continued growth of the mid-level Student Services leader. Building that time and space into their calendar will ensure that the leader has set aside time to reflect. Through the journaling process, it will allow the mid-level Student Services leader to see their growth over time. This can also allow the mid-level Student Services leader to set goals for growth in their own leadership. Based on the finding that mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they are self-reflective of their own practice, it can be concluded that to build an environment that engages and meets the needs of diverse students and staff, mid-level Student Services leaders must set aside time to reflect on their decisions and interactions.

Conclusion 6: To foster an equity minded culture and climate, it is essential to hear the stories of the lived experiences of diverse staff and students.

This study explored the culturally responsive strategies utilized by mid-level Student Services leaders within the California Community Colleges. Through semi-structured interviews, participants shared about how their own journey has influenced them and the importance of listening to the lived experiences of their diverse students and staff. Listening to the stories of students and staff that come from marginalized communities, provides an opportunity for mid-Student Services leaders as well as the campus community to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences and needs of marginalized students and staff. Based on the finding that mid-level Student Services

leaders are culturally responsive when they recognize how their own journey has influenced them, it can be concluded that in order foster an equity minded culture and climate, it is essential to hear the lived experience stories of staff and students.

Conclusion 7: A continual focus on data is necessary to develop culturally responsive interventions for marginalized populations.

Mid-level Student Services leaders reported utilizing data to engage in critical analysis of practices and practices as a key culturally responsive leadership strategy. This constant focus on the data is essential to developing culturally responsive interventions for marginalized populations. To achieve a consistent focus on data, it is essential that employees have training and tools to access disaggregated data dashboards. In addition, it is essential to have training on data literacy to provide a comprehensive understanding of the story the data is telling especially in regards to marginalized populations. From there, goals can be established and assessed towards meeting the needs of diverse students. Based on the finding that mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when utilize data to engage in critical analysis of processes and practices it can be concluded that a continual focus on data is necessary to develop culturally responsive interventions for marginalized populations

Conclusion 8: Providing opportunities for staff members to lead and grow fosters a climate of building leadership capacity.

This study sought to identify the culturally responsive leadership strategies utilized by mid-level Student Services leaders within the California community colleges. One of the culturally responsive strategies identified in this research study that is utilized

by mid-level Student Services leaders is to build on the strengths of their diverse team members. Zisken (2016) found that part of modern-day leadership is to identify and build the leadership potential in others. This can be achieved through ensuring that staff, faculty, and leaders have the opportunity to collaborate, learn from others, and have opportunities for formal and informal learning. Through providing these learning opportunities, it will build on the leadership capacity of the staff and faculty that the mid-level Student Services leader supervises. Based on the finding that mid-level Student Service leaders are culturally responsive when they build on the strengths of their diverse team members it can be concluded that providing opportunities for staff members to lead and grow fosters a climate of building leadership capacity

Conclusion 9: In order to have staff and faculty that have similar demographics as the students that they serve, there must be an active focus on hiring practices.

Cervantes (2015) found that the diversity of the student population at California community colleges is increasing. Having staff and faculty that are representative of the demographics of students is essential to student success. Based upon the Vision for Success: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Report (2020), the diversity of the staff and faculty of the California community colleges continues to be significantly less than that of the students they serve. It is imperative that a focus be placed on the hiring practices to ensure that people of diverse communities are actively recruited. Based upon the finding that mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when utilize data to engage in critical analysis of processes and practices, it can be concluded that in order to have staff and faculty that have similar demographics as the students that they serve, mid-

level Student Services leaders must work collaboratively to actively focus on hiring practices.

Implications for Action

Based upon the findings and conclusions of this research study that focused on the culturally responsive leadership strategies utilized by mid-level Student Services leaders in serving diverse students and staff, the researcher recommends the following implications for action. These recommendations are directed toward college leaders, particularly at the CCC chancellor's office level, college presidents, vice presidents of Student Services, college administrators across divisions, human resources, associated student bodies, and CCC Student Services leaders.

Implication for Action 1: It is recommended that college leadership dedicate funding to an outside entity to conduct ongoing and regular audits of the delivery of services. Having an understanding of the authentic experiences of diverse students as they access support services is essential to identifying ways on how it can be improved. Based on the finding that mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they utilize data to engage in critical analysis of process and practices and the conclusion that regular audits of such processes and practices are essential to ensure continual improvement in servicing diverse populations, it is recommended that college leadership dedicate funding to work with an outside entity, to provide diverse consultants that are reflective of the populations the college serves to audit delivery of services It is further recommended that the diverse consultants alternate their visits between the semesters biannually. Then the mid-level Student Services leaders can share and discuss the findings of the service delivery audit with staff and faculty of the area.

Working collaboratively, the mid-Student Services leader and their team develop and implement remedies to the customer service opportunities for growth by the semester after the audit. Through this process, it captures the experiences marginalized students face as they navigate through the processes and interactions within Student Services. It is an opportunity to highlight the strengths as well as opportunities for growth in terms of processes and customer service through the lens of equity. Through this process, the mid-Student Services leader and their team would develop and implement remedies to address any barriers or opportunities for improvement in process or service identified through the audit by the following semester. Through this consistent assessments and remedies of process and customer service, it ensures that the mid-level Student Services leader and their team are in a continual cycle of growth in the delivery of services.

Implication for Action 2: It is recommended that the Vice President of Student Services collaborate with mid-level Student Services leaders to establish a cross functional Basic Needs Student Support Team. Marginalized students may fall through the cracks for support as they may not be aware of the services available to support them on campus as well as through the community. Developing a safety net in which any staff member can bring forth cases for specific need or support for students to a cross functional team that can brainstorm resolutions and supports for the specific student need. Based upon the finding that mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they utilize strategic allies to push forward equity initiatives and the conclusion that such alliances can be leveraged to meet the basic needs of marginalized students, it is recommended that the Vice President of Student Services in collaboration with mid-level Student Services establish a cross functional Basic Needs Student Support

Team be established. The Basic Needs Student Support Team would be a cross functional team consisting of diverse faculty, staff, and leaders mainly from the Student Services and Instruction divisions. It is further recommended that a process be established in which student referrals are made to the Basic Needs Student Support Team. This referral process would also contain a release of information from the students It is further recommended that a release of information be developed so that student information can be shared with the Basic Needs Student Support Team and any identified support resources within the community. The Basic Needs Student Support Team would meet at least once a month and the student referral cases of need are presented by an employee that is working with the student. The Basic Needs Student Support Team would brainstorm collaboratively to address the student's needs presented and a plan of action is developed as to what resources are recommended. It is further recommended that the Basic Needs Student Support Team provide an annual report to the campus of the number of referrals made and the outcomes.

Implication for Action 3: It is recommended that mid-level Student Services leaders understand the functions and model customer service expectations of delivery of service to diverse students by spending 1 hour every other week on the front lines on a rotational basis. Knowing and understanding the experiences of marginalized students and the staff serving them on the front lines as well as being able to model expectations of service are important aspects of a successful mid-level Student Services leader. Based upon the findings that mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they lead by example it can be concluded orienting services through the lens of servant leadership ensures that culturally responsive customer service to students is at the heart of

all services provided. It is recommended that mid-level Student Services leaders prioritize 1 hour every other week on their calendar to serve on the front lines of the different service areas that they supervise. If the mid-level Student Services leaders oversee multiple departments, this time on the front lines would be on a rotational basis. It is further recommended that the mid-level Student Services leader take 10 minutes after the 1 hour of working the front line and reflect on what worked well and opportunities for growth in service to students. Then it is recommended that the mid-level Student Services leader attends the next department meeting to provide open discussion with the team of the strengths and opportunities for growth in service to students. Through this process, it provides a window into the experiences of marginalized students as well as the experiences of front-line staff. It allows the mid-level Student Services leader to have a keen understanding of the delivery of services and model the servant leadership expectations of service. It further provides an opportunity for the mid-level Student Services leader an opportunity to align the delivery of services especially to at-risk populations, address any gaps, and it provides coaching opportunities for subordinates on customer service.

Implication for Action 4: It is recommended that the mid-level Student Services leader coordinates a Fall semester in person or virtual visit to another California community college that is outside of the District to immerse staff with practices utilized at other colleges to address the needs of marginalized students. Mid-level Student Services utilized the culturally responsive leadership strategy of actively engaging in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. As a result, it can be concluded that ongoing relevant diversity, equity, and inclusion professional

development on best practices is necessary. It is recommended that the mid-level Student Services leader during the program review cycle coordinate a Fall semester in person or virtual site visit to another California community college that is outside of the District. It is further recommended that during this field trip, staff collaborate, learn, and immerse themselves in how student-facing essential practices, processes, and procedures are done at the other institutions that are leading to more successful student outcomes especially for marginalized populations. It is further recommended that the mid-level Student Services leader lead their team in a discussion on the learning and insights from the field trip and identify best practices that can be implemented on their campus after the site visit to better serve diverse populations. Then the mid-level Student Services leader works collaboratively with their team through the rest of Fall to develop an implementation plan to be executed in Spring. Through this process, it allows for active and practical professional development on best practices to serve diverse student populations. In addition, it builds professional allies across districts to be in this continual cycle of supporting each other with growth and sharing of innovative ideas to better serve marginalized populations.

Implication 5: It is recommended that the California Community College Chancellor's Office coordinates an annual virtual best practices symposium for Student Services leaders and staff through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Across the 116 California community colleges, there is innovation in achieving better outcomes for marginalized students. Opportunities to share and collaborate about such best practices are limited for colleges outside of their district. Creating more opportunities to collaborate and share learnings of best practices across the

California community college system breakdowns silos and builds strong relationships across state of front line staff and leadership Based on the finding that mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they actively engage in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion and the conclusion that professional development on best practices, it is recommended that the California Community College Chancellor's Office coordinates an annual virtual best practices symposium for Student Services leaders and staff through the lens of equity. It is recommended that there be a keynote speaker and then breakout rooms based upon interest like counseling, financial aid, etc. It is recommended that within the breakout room, mid-level leaders and staff share best practices and challenges to addressing the needs of diverse students. Furthermore, it is also recommended that informal time be set aside for networking. Through this process of sharing best practices and challenges and the informal time for networking, it provides an opportunity for mid-level Student Services leaders and their teams to actively engage with other California community colleges employees from across the state to dialogue about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Implication 6: It is recommended that mid-level Student Services leaders schedule 30 minutes of uninterrupted time at the end of the day to reflect on the decisions they made that day. Being reflective of one's own growth and development is an important component of being a transformational leader (Marta, 2022). This was also one of the culturally responsive leadership strategies utilized by mid-level Student Services leaders identified in this research study. Based on the finding that mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they are self-reflective of their own

practice it can be concluded that to build an environment that engages and meets the needs of diverse students and staff, mid-level Student Services leaders must set aside time to reflect on their decisions and interactions. Therefore, it is recommended that mid-level Student Services leaders schedule 30 minutes of uninterrupted time at the end of the day to reflect on the decisions they made that day. It is further recommended that mid-level Student Services leaders then journal their successes, challenges, and failures. Through this dedicated time for reflection and journaling, it provides dedicated time and opportunity for the mid-level leader to be reflective of their practice and the decisions that they make through the lens of equity. It is further recommended that mid-level Student Services leaders utilize a half day retreat at the beginning of each academic year to review and reflect journal entries of the previous year and develop self-growth goals. It is further recommended that a 360 evaluation is adopted so that mid-level leaders can receive feedback from their subordinates and peers. Mid-level Student Services leaders use the responses from subordinates and peers received on through their evaluation as more feedback on strengths and opportunities for growth. Future evaluation goals can be based upon this feedback and their own reflections. Through this comprehensive introspection and extrospection process, it provides the mid-level Student Services leader opportunities to be in a continual growth cycle in their leadership in serving diverse staff and students.

Implication for Action 7: It is recommended that each division, on a rotating basis, host an open house at the beginning of each semester to provide greater access and visibility of services available to support diverse students. On a typical California community college campus, there are a wide array of services provided across the

campus. To cultivate relationships across campus and to foster a collaborative environment focused on meeting the needs of marginalized students, it is recommended that each division on a rotating basis, host an open house at the beginning of each semester. It is recommended that the timing of the open house be when the most faculty, staff, and administrators are available to attend. Attendees of the open house learn about the function, roles, and practices of each of the departments within the division. Through the open house, an opportunity to build relationships across campus, learn about the various services offered to support students, and collaborate outside of their own silos to address the needs of diverse students is created. Developing a greater understanding and visibility across campus of the services available to support diverse students provides an opportunity for greater access and utilization of services.

Implication for Action 8: It is recommended that one week of the academic year is dedicated to recognizing and celebrating diversity. Through semi-structured interviews, participants shared the importance of understanding the lived experiences of students and staff that come from marginalized communities. Through sharing of experiences by students and staff coming from marginalized communities, it provides an opportunity to further learn and create a more inclusive culture. It fosters a sense of belonging as the cultures and voices of the students and staff from marginalized communities are raised and heard. Based on the finding that mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they recognize how their own journey has influenced, and the conclusion that in order foster an equity minded culture and climate, it is recommended that one week of the academic year is dedicated to recognizing and celebrating diversity. It is further recommended that during this week, all divisions of the

college (instruction, student services, leadership, marketing, etc.) are all immersed in understanding the various cultures the student body is made up of. It is further recommended that the Associated Student Body will work collaboratively with staff and leadership coordinators for this week-long celebration and will provide diverse student speakers throughout the week that will share their lived experiences. In addition to student speakers, diverse staff will have opportunity to share their lived experiences. It is further recommended that these experiences are captured and memorialized in a variety of venues such as Facebook, twitter, college website, etc. that are shared throughout the academic year.

Implication for Action 9: It is recommended that the college develop data dashboards that can be readily utilized by programs and departments to address gaps within academic and service areas in serving marginalized students. To make data driven decisions, it requires that the appropriate staff, faculty, and leadership have access to readily available data. In addition, it is essential that all staff, faculty, and leaders be provided training in data literacy so that there is a cohesive and practical understanding of the data. Based on the finding that mid-level Student Services leaders are culturally responsive when they utilize data to engage in critical analysis of processes and practices and the conclusion that a continual focus on data is necessary to develop culturally responsive interventions for marginalized populations, it is recommended that the Institutional Effectiveness Department of the college develop data dashboards that can be readily utilized by programs and departments. The data dashboards would contain campus wide metrics as well as specific department and program metrics that are disaggregated data of marginalized populations. It is further recommended the

Institutional Effectiveness Department provide training on the dashboard and how they can be utilized to identify gaps with marginalized populations. To further close the loop, it is further recommended that goals set using the dashboards be incorporated into the program review cycle. Through each program review cycle, the assessment of progress towards reaching the goals can be determined and potential new goals can be established.

Implication for Action 10: It is recommended that the California Community College Chancellor's Office establish a year-long leadership preparation program. Providing staff and faculty opportunities to learn and grow in their leadership is essential in building a culture of continual growth. Mid-level Student Services leaders in this study reported that one of the culturally responsive leadership strategies that they utilize is to build on the strengths of their team members. From this it can be concluded that providing opportunities for staff members to lead and grow fosters a climate of building leadership capacity. It is recommended that the California Community College Chancellor's Office in partnership and collaboration with the RP Group (Research, Planning, and Professional Development of California Community Colleges), Academic Senate of California Community Colleges, California School Employees Association and the Association of California Community College Administrators develop two formal one year long staff and faculty leadership preparation program pathways. It is further recommended that one pathway be designed for instructional faculty and staff and the other be designed for Student Services faculty and staff with overlapping opportunities for collaboration between the two pathways. The goal of this leadership development program would include equipping faculty and staff with a thorough understanding of

evidence-based practices both in the classroom and outside the classroom to support greater positive outcomes for diverse students. It is further recommended that each new faculty and staff member be required to attend and complete their pathway as a part of their employment within the first 3 years. Goals for growth from this leadership development program can be incorporated into the employee evaluations. Through this leadership development program, it provides a strong foundation for leadership capacity especially in serving diverse students and communities.

Implication for Action 11: It is recommended that Human Resources Departments within the California Community Colleges cast a wider net to be more inclusive of potential applicants that otherwise would be marginalized for positions at their college. Students of color having staff, faculty, and leaders around them that look like them, come from a similar culture and/or speak their native language builds an environment that fosters a sense of belonging for students. The responsibility falls on colleges and districts to ensure that there is active focus on hiring practices. Based on the findings that culturally responsive leaders are culturally responsive when they utilize data to engage in critical analysis of process and practices and the conclusion that to have staff and faculty that have similar demographics as the students that they serve, mid-level Student Services leaders recommend that there be an active focus on hiring practices. Therefore, it is recommended that the Human Resources Department within the college or District cast a wider net to be more inclusive of potential applicants that otherwise would be marginalized. It is further recommended that the Office of the President lead a SWOT analysis every three years to identify obstacles that may be hindering the hire of a

more diversified staff and faculty. It is further recommended that the results of the SWOT analysis are built into an action plan for the campus and HR for the following three years.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study investigated the lived experiences of sixteen California community college mid-level Student Services leaders and how they are culturally responsive in their leadership strategies based on Horsford et al. (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership framework. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends the following for further research:

- This study was part of a larger thematic group studying culturally responsive leadership in California community college leaders. It is recommended that a meta-analysis be conducted to identify common culturally responsive leadership strategies utilized among the six groups of California community college leaders. The thematic studies included senior-level leaders of color, library leaders, EOPS leaders, Latina leaders, and financial aid leaders.

- It is recommended that this study be replicated in other higher education settings. This is a gap in the research, as much of the published research on culturally responsive leadership focused on public, private, for profit and not for profit universities.

- It is recommended that this study be replicated with other specific mid-level Student Services leaders of color and the culturally responsive leadership strategies that they utilize. There is a gap in literature on mid-level Student Services leaders, especially leaders of color.

- It is recommended that a study be conducted on the leadership development of CCC mid-level Student Services leaders. This is a gap in the research, given that only a few formal studies have been published on mid-level Student Services leadership.
- It is recommended that a comparative study be conducted on community colleges in other states such as Texas, Arizona, and New York to investigate culturally responsive leadership strategies among mid-level Student Services leaders and analyze how they compare to culturally responsive leadership strategies among California community college mid-level Student Services leaders.
- It is recommended that a retrospective study be conducted on recently retired California community college mid-level Student Services leaders to investigate the need for culturally responsive leadership when working with diverse student populations.
- It is recommended that a study be conducted on the development of cultural agility of mid-level Student Services leaders within California community colleges and how it intersects with culturally responsive leadership.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Through this ethnographic research study, the culturally responsive strategies utilized by mid-level Student Services leaders within California Community Colleges were investigated. With their unique positionality, mid-level Student Services leaders have a bird's eye view into current practices and barriers for diverse students, a valuable and critical link to the lived experiences of students and the front-line staff that serve

them. Mid-level Student Services leaders are often the bridge between students, staff, and senior leadership making key decisions.

Student success cannot be addressed in silos. Instruction and Student Services must work cross-functionally and address the diverse student needs holistically. Mid-level Student Services leaders have key insights about student success and it is essential that they have a seat at the table when discussing the academic and career success of students. They offer a powerful and unique lens that is directly connected to the student experience. It is critical that more opportunities are provided for instruction and student services to collaborate. The participants of this research study shared about the successes of initiatives such as AB 705, Basic Needs Initiative, and Dual Enrollment when student services and instruction collaborated together. It is my sincere hope that senior leadership of California community colleges actively engage in breaking down the silos to address the needs of diverse populations.

Furthermore, this collaborative spirit needs to expand from single campus efforts to systemwide initiatives throughout California Community Colleges. From the interviews of mid-level Student Services leaders conducted for this research study, it is clear that there are promising and innovative equity-minded practices to increase student success being implemented at different campuses. The opportunities to share these best practices and actively engage in conversations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion between all of the colleges within the entire California community college system needs to be expanded.

What I gained from this research study was so much more than I could have anticipated. All 16 participants in this research study inspired me with their commitment

and continuous advocacy for equity. Through their culturally responsive leadership practices, they are amplifying the voices of diverse students and staff. Mid-level Student Services leaders are the bold, passionate, and brave voices for equity.

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Young, R. B. (2007). Still leaders! Still invisible? In R. L. Ackerman (Ed.), *The mid-level manager in student affairs: Strategies for success,* (pp. 1-25). Washington, DC: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Synthesis Matrix

Source	Higher Education	Community College	Mid-level Leaders	Student Services	Culturally Responsive	Culturally Relevant
Academic Senate for California Community Colleges. (2020). Anti-racism education in the California community colleges. Retrieved from https://www.asccc.org/sites/default/files/Anti-Racism_Education_F20.pdf		X			X	X
Achterman, D. (2019). AB 705 disrupts community colleges, provides opportunities for K-12 information literacy. California School Library Association, 43(1), 19-21.		X				
Ainscow, M. (2005). Developing inclusive education systems: What are the levers for change? Journal of Educational Change, 6, 109–124. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-005-1298-4					X	
American Association of Community Colleges. (2018). AACC competencies for community college leaders (3rd ed.). Retrieved from https://www.aacc.nche.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2018/11/AACC-2018 Competencies_111618_5.1.pdf		X				

Amey, M. J., Garza Mitchell, R. L., Rosales, J., & Giardello, K. J. (2020). Reconceptualizing midlevel leadership. New Directions for Community Colleges, 2020(191), 127-132. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20416			X			
Barnett, B., & Felten, P. (2016). Intersectionality in action: A guide for faculty and campus leaders for creating inclusive classrooms and institutions. Sterling, VA: Stylus.					X	
Baston, M. A. (2018). Elevating student affairs practice in community college redesign. Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 42(11), 812-817. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2018.1446057				X		
Bell, D. A., Jr. (1980). Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-convergence dilemma. Harvard Law Review, 93(3), 518-533. https://doi.org/10.2307/1340546					X	X
Bell, D. A., Jr. (1995). Racial realism. in K. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller, & K. Thomas (Eds.), Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement (pp. 302-314). New York, NY: New Press.					X	X

Benitez, M., Jr. (2010). Resituating culture centers within a social justice framework. In L. D. Patton (Ed.), Culture centers in higher education: Perspectives on identity, theory, and practice (pp. 119-134). Alexandria, VA: Stylus.					X	X
Bensimon, E. M. (2007). The underestimated significance of practitioner knowledge in the scholarship of student success. The Review of Higher Education, 30(4), 441-469. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2007.0032	X			X		
Bensimon, E. M., Rueda, R., Dowd, A. C., & Harris, F., III. (2007). Accountability, equity, and practitioner learning and change. Metropolitan, 18(3), 28-45.	X			X		
Brinegar, K. (2019). Equity & cultural responsiveness in the middle grades. Alexandria, VA: Information Age Publishing.					X	
Brown, K. M. (2004). Leadership for social justice and equity: Weaving a transformative framework and pedagogy. Educational Administration Quarterly, 40, 77–108. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X03259147	X				X	X

Brunson, M. (2020). Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction: A phenomenological study on how mid-level administrators learn and acquire leadership skills in higher education [Doctoral dissertation]. Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.brandman.edu/edd_dissertations/311			X			
California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2014). California community colleges student success and support program handbook. Retrieved from https://www.deanza.edu/equity-plan/sssp-se-bsi/documents/sssphandbook.pdf	X	X				
California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2017). Vision for success: Strengthening the California Community Colleges to meet California's needs. Retrieved from https://www.cccco.edu/-/media/CCCCO-Website/About-Us/Reports/Files/vision-for-Success.ashx	X	X				
California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2019). Vision for success: Strengthening the California Community Colleges to meet California's needs. Retrieved from https://www.cccco.edu/-/media/CCCCO-Website/About-Us/Reports/Files/vision-for-success.pdf	X	X				

California Community College Chancellor's Office (2020a). Diversity, equity, and inclusion glossary of terms. Retrieved from https://www.cccco.edu/-/media/CCCCO-Website/Files/Communications/vision-for-success/8-dei-glossary-of-terms.pdf	X	X			X	
California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2020b). Vision for success: Diversity, equity, and inclusion task force summary report. Retrieved from https://www.cccco.edu/-/media/CCCCO-Website/Reports/CCCCO_DEI_Report.pdf	X	X			X	
California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2022). What we do. Retrieved from https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/Student-Service/What-we-do	X	X				
California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2023). Equitable Placement: AB 705 and AB1705. Retrieved from https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/equitable-placement	X	X				
California Community Colleges Extended Opportunity Programs and Services Association.	X	X				

(2022). Our mission. Retrieved from https://www.ccceopsa.org/our-mission						
California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force. (2012). Advancing student success in the California community colleges. Retrieved from https://www.careerladdersproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/REPORT_SSTF_FINAL_122911.pdf	X	X		X		
Capper, C. A. (2015). The 20th-year anniversary of critical race theory in education: Implications for leading to eliminate racism. Educational Administration Quarterly, 51(5), 791–833. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X15607616					X	
Cervantes, E. (2015). Studying demographics, student equity, and organizational culture of a California Community College: A case study of transformational leadership. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.	X	X			X	
Cohen, A. M., & Brawer, F. B. (2008). The American community college (5th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.	X	X				

Community College Research Center. (2015). What we know about Guided Pathways. Retrieved from https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/What-We-Know-Guided-Pathways.pdf.	X	X		X		
Cooper, C. W. (2009). Performing cultural work in demographically changing schools: Implications for expanding transformative leadership frameworks. Educational Administration Quarterly, 45(5), 694-724. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X09341639					X	X
Cooper, C. W. (2010). Educational leaders as cultural workers: Engaging families and school communities through transformative leadership. In S. D. Horford (Ed.), New perspectives in educational leadership: Exploring social, political, and community contexts and meaning (pp. 173-195). New York, NY: Peter Lang.					X	X
Crawford,L. (1999, March). Extended opportunity programs and services for community college retention. Paper presented at the Annual California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Statewide Conference, Monterey, CA		X		X		
Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. University of					X	X

Chicago Legal Forum, 1989(1). Retrieved from https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf						
Cuellar-Mejia, M., Rodriquez, O., & Johnson, H. (2018). Remedial education reforms at California's community colleges: Early evidence on placement and curricular reforms. Public Policy Institute of California. Retrieved from https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/remedial-education-reforms-at-californias-community-colleges-august-2018.pdf	X	X				
Dancy, T. E., & Horsford, S. (2010). Considering the social context of school and campus communities: The importance of culturally proficient leadership. In S. D. Horsford (Ed.), New perspectives in educational leadership: Exploring social, political, and community contexts and meaning (pp. 153-172). New York, NY: Lang.					X	X
Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (1993). Critical race theory: An annotated bibliography. Virginia Law Review, 79, 461-516. https://doi.org/10.2307/1073418					X	X
Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). Critical race theory: An introduction. New York, NY: NYU Press. https://scholarship.law.ua.edu/fac_books/8					X	X

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2012). Critical race theory: An introduction (2nd ed.). New York, NY: NYU Press.					X	X
Drury, R. L. (2003). Community colleges in America: A historical perspective. Inquiry, 8(1), 1-6. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ876835.pdf		X				
Ebbers, L., Conover, K. S., & Samuels, A. (2010). Leading from the middle: Preparing leaders for new roles. New Directions for Community Colleges, 2010(149), 59-64. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.396		X	X			
Ellis, H., & Moon, J. (1991). The mid-manager: Truly in the middle. In P. L. Moore (Ed.), Managing the political dimension of student affairs (pp. 43–54). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.			X			
Garland, P. H. (1985). Serving more than students: A critical need for college student personnel services. Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Higher Education.		X		X		
Garland, P. H., & Grace, T. W. (1993). New perspectives for student affairs professionals: Evolving realities, responsibilities and roles. Washington, DC: School of Education and	X			X		

Human Development, George Washington University						
Gay, G. (2000). Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.					X	
Gay G. (2002). Culturally responsive teaching in special education for ethnically diverse students: Setting the stage. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 15, 613–629. https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839022000014349					X	
Gay G. (2010). Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teacher College Press.					X	
Gay G., & Kirkland K. (2003). Developing cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection in preservice teacher education. Theory Into Practice, 42, 181–187. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4203_3					X	
Gordon, S. P., & Ronder, A. (2016). Perceptions of culturally responsive leadership inside and outside of a principal preparation program. International Journal of Educational Reform					X	

25(2), 125-153. https://doi.org/10.1177/105678791602500202						
Hollowell, C. (2019). Culturally responsive school leadership: How principals use culturally responsive leadership strategies to develop engaging and inclusive school environments for all students [Doctoral dissertation]. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. (UMI No. 13810734)					X	
Horsford, S. D., Grosland, T., & Gunn, K. M. (2011). Pedagogy of the personal and professional: Toward a framework for culturally relevant leadership. Journal of School Leadership, 21(4), 582-606. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268461102100404						X
Irvine J. J. (2002). In search of wholeness: African American teachers and their culturally competent classroom practices. New York, NY: Palgrave.					X	X
Johnson, H., & Mejia, M. C. (2019). California higher education system. Public Policy Institute of California Higher Education Center. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED603856	X	X				

Johnson, L., & Fuller, C. (2014). Culturally responsive leadership. New York, NY: Oxford Bibliographies. https://doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780199756810-0067					X	
Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E. (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature. Review of Educational Research, 86(4), 1272-1311. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316630383					X	
Koltai, L. (1993). Community colleges: Making winners out of ordinary people. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED339401		X				
Ladson-Billings, G. (1992). Reading between the lines and beyond the pages: A culturally relevant approach to literacy teaching. Theory Into Practice, 31(4), 312-320. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849209543558						X
Ladson-Billings, G. (1998) Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 11(1), 7-24. https://doi.org/10.1080/095183998236863						X

Ladson-Billings. G. (2009). The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African-American children (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.						X
Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. (1995). Toward a Critical Race Theory of education. Teachers College Record, 97(1), 47-68. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819509700104						X
Lindsey, R. B., Robins, K. N., & Terrell, R.D. (2009). Cultural proficiency: A manual for school leaders. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.					X	X
Madhlangobe, L., Gordon, S. P. (2012). Culturally responsive leadership in a diverse school: A case study of a high school leader. NASSP Bulletin, 96, 177–202. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636512450909					X	
Marta, J. (2022). Cultural intelligence practices community college presidents use to lead their organization [Doctoral dissertation]. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (UMI No. 29399163)					X	
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APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

PROFESSIONAL DUTY

Equity is a focal point in the CCCs. Given this current climate, culturally responsive leadership is at the center of building equity-minded institutions and campus cultures. The first set of questions will look at your sense of professional duty in leading for equity and excellence.

1. In what ways do you feel a sense of professional duty or obligation to lead for equity, social justice, and anti-racism in your institution?

2. Are there strategies that you use to promote social justice and ensure student success? If so, can you share what some of those strategies are? (who developed these strategies, who is involved, when are they used?).

3. Part of leading in this space is building an equity-minded culture, how do you and your team/institution accomplish this?

PERSONAL JOURNEY

As I shared earlier, Culturally Responsive Leadership takes into consideration the identities and experiences of team members, students, and communities that we serve, to create more inclusive environments. This set of questions focuses on your personal journey which includes your experiences and personal identities. I encourage you to share openly and I want to hear any stories you are comfortable sharing.

1. Please tell me about your personal identity (for example, race, ethnicity, language, gender, religion, etc.). I am interested in how those identities influence your view of the world and how you lead.

2. Considering your lived experiences, how have they influenced your leading equity efforts
   at your institution?

3. Have there been times when you felt like an insider, or an outsider, leading equity efforts at your institution? Please share an example. How has this impacted your leadership approach?

4. Can you live out your personal identities (can you bring your authentic self) in your workplace, or are there incongruencies? And if so, how do you mediate the differences in your personal and professional worlds?

PEDAGOGY

Culturally responsive leaders work to build an inclusive environment that actively values the identities and lived experiences of all students and staff. This set of questions focuses on pedagogy, in other words, your approach to building inclusive environments.

1. As a leader, how do you develop a climate of cultural affirmation within your department and across the institution?

2. How do you build a team that has the capacity to serve ethnically and culturally diverse
   students?

3. In your effort to build an inclusive environment, inevitably challenges come up. What is your approach to working with these challenges?

POLITICAL

The last set of questions explores the political context. When leaders seek to be culturally responsive, one approach is to be mindful of the political contexts in which we lead. In the Community Colleges, teams are quite diverse and as such, varying degrees of points of views are often present. In fact, some political points of views can differ quite dramatically.

1. How do you build consensus and alliances around culturally relevant policies and practices?

2. As a leader, how do you develop meaningful and positive relationships with students, staff, faculty and community constituents so that you can be culturally responsive to your team?
   a. How do you deepen your understanding of your staff's perspectives?

3. Looking back at your experiences in leading within the political context, what advice would you give your younger self-regarding cultural responsiveness.

APPENDIX C

Interview Script

Researcher: Amandeep Kandola
Participant #: _____ Date: _____

Introduction

Hello, my name is Amandeep Kandola and I am a doctoral candidate at University of Massachusetts Global. Thank you for participating in this interview. I understand how busy you are, and I appreciate you spending time with me today. You've been selected to participate in this study based on your wealth of knowledge and experience as a leader in the community college system.

First, I would like to review the Informed Consent Form that was provided to you when the interview was scheduled. I understand that you have already read and reviewed this form. I will provide an additional copy. Please let me know if you have any questions.

To review:
• Your name, responses, and opinions will be kept confidential.
• The interview will take approximately 45 minutes.
• Research findings will be shared with you upon request.
• Do you have any questions before we begin?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of mid-level Student Services leaders within California Community Colleges to gain insight into the culturally responsive leadership practices and strategies used to develop engaging and inclusive environments. The study uses the Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework.

Before we begin the interview, I want to inform you that this research was approved by BUIRB which is University of Massachusetts Global Institutional Review Board. This committee
reviews and approves research that involves human beings.

I would like to remind you that this interview will be recorded so I can make sure to transcribe your answers correctly. Again, this transcription will be sent to you upon request or so you can review it for accuracy. Please remember that your name will be anonymous. Additionally, all names will be removed from the transcript as well.

Once again, thank you for taking time to allow me to interview you. If you have any questions or need a break, please feel free to pause the interview. As previous agreed upon, we will end the interview at ____.

Conclusion

Thank you for your time today. I will send you a transcript of your responses so you can review it for accuracy.

APPENDIX D

UMASS GLOBAL
A nonprofit affiliate of the University of Massachusetts

UMASS GLOBAL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment,or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.

2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.

3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.

4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.

5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.

6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing tobe involved and during the course of the study.

7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.

8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree tobe in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should askthe researchers to answer them. You also may contact the UMASS GLOBAL Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteersin research projects. The UMass Global Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 orby writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent

Information About: Culturally Responsive Strategies Utilized by Mid-Level Student Services Leaders within California Community College.

Responsible Investigator: Amandeep (Aman) Kandola, Doctoral Candidate

Purpose of Study: You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Amandeep Kandola, a doctoral student from University of Massachusetts Global. The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of mid-level Student Services leaders within California Community Colleges to gain insight into the culturally responsive leadership practices and strategies principals use to develop engaging and inclusive environments. The study uses the Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework.

Why is this research being done? This study aims to capture the lived experiences of mid-level Student Services leaders in serving and leading their diverse teams and students. The objective is to discover concrete culturally responsive leadership practices and strategies used to engage diverse staff and students.

This study will add to the body of knowledge about culturally responsive practices used by leaders with particular emphasis on higher education. The review of the literature revealed a considerable amount of research on the practices of K12 leaders but a dearth of research exploring culturally responsive leadership within the California community college context.

Additionally, very few studies focused on how mid-level Student Services leaders draw upon their lived experiences, cultural wealth of knowledge, and personal identities to lead their staff in culturally responsive ways.

Currently, California community colleges are focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and are faced with an urgency to make structural and institutionalchanges to address the persistent achievement gaps of students from marginalized populations. The results of this study may help to change traditional leadership paradigms and inspire the field to engage in new thinking about how lived experience, attributes of one's cultural identity, and the value of voice can enhance educational leadership practice to address the equity and social justice imperatives in community colleges.

Who are potential participants? Potential participants include mid-level Student Services leaders within California Community Colleges.

What is expected of the participants? For those who agree to be participants, they will decide to take part in the research study by signing the Informed Consent document. Mid-level Student Services leaders will complete an interview with Amandeep Kandola, researcher. All interviews will be recorded. A transcript of the interview will be sent to

the participant for review and correction. The interview can be paused or discontinued at any time by the participant. Observations will occur virtually. Artifacts gathered by the researcher will be kept strictly confidential and in a locked location only accessible to the researcher.

How much time is required from the participant? Then individual interviews will take approximately 45 minutes. The interviews will be audio recorded and a transcript of the interview will be sent to the participant for review and anything that the participant feels is in error or should be omitted, will be done addressed by the researcher. The recordings will be kept in a secured electronic file, accessible to only the researcher for review of the conversation for validity of the responses. The electronic files and transcription will be destroyed three years after the research is completed. The observations may vary from half an hour to 2 hours depending on the activity being observed virtually.

Where will the interviews and observations take place? In sensitivity to the COVID 19 pandemic, the interviews will take place online via Zoom at an agreed upon time. In addition, the observations will also occur online via the time recommended by the participant in either academic or non-academic setting.

What benefit can the participants consider? Participants will not be compensated for his/her contribution but will agree to participate on a voluntary basis. Participants may feel rewarded knowing they contributed to growing literature around inclusive higher education environments.

How will the participants' confidentiality be protected? The researcher will keep all recorded interviews, observation documentation, and artifacts in a locked location only accessible to the researcher. Pseudo names will be used for all participants except for the signed consent form which will be kept secure by the researcher and then destroyed three years after the research study is completed.

What risks can the participant expect? There is minimal to no risk of physical, psychological, social, or financial risk to participate in this research.

I understand that:

By participating in this study, I agree to complete an interview with researcher, Amandeep Kandola. The virtual interview will take approximately 45 minutes and will be scheduled based on date and time that works best for me. Additionally, if there are opportunities for observation that I would like the researcher to attend or artifacts that I would like to share, I will let the researcher know. Completion of the interview will occur in the Spring of 2022.

There are minimal risks associated with the research. I understand that the researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping my identifying documents in a locked drawer accessible only to the researcher.

Potential benefit of this study will include my contribution of experience to the literature on culturally responsive leadership. The findings of the study will be available to me at the conclusion of the study. I will not be compensated for my participation. I willingly participate on a voluntary basis. At any time, I wish to discontinue my participation in the research, I can do so; however, I will need to contact Amandeep Kandola to alert her of my discontinued participation.

Audio Recording Release: I understand that as part of this study, I am participating in an interview which will be audio recorded as a digital file upon my permission.
If I do agree to being audio recorded, the sole purpose is to support data collection as part of the study.

Only the researcher and the professional transcriptionist, if utilized, will have access to the audio file. The digital audio file will be destroyed after completion of the study and the written transcription will be stored securely in a locked file drawer and confidentially shredded and destroyed after three years following completion of the study.

If I have any questions or concerns, I can contact Amandeep Kandola, researcher, at kand7201@mail.umassglobal.edu or by cell phone at 530-315-2944 or the dissertation chairperson, Dr. Jeffrey Lee at jlee1@umassglobal.edu. I can also contact the Office of the Assistant Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, University of Massachusetts Global, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the "Research Participant's Bill of Rights." I have read the above and understand it, and I hereby consent to the procedures set forth.

Printed Name of Participant	Signature of Participant
Printed Name of Researcher	Signature of Researcher

APPENDIX F

Solicitation Email

Hello fellow Student Services leaders,

My name is Aman Kandola and I currently work as a Dean of Student Success within the California community college system.

Additionally, I am a student pursuing a Doctorate in Educational Leadership (Ed.D) through University of Massachusetts Global formerly known as Brandman University. I am a part of a thematic cohort team that is exploring the lived experiences of leaders withing the California Community Colleges to gain insight into the culturally responsive leadership practices and strategies used to develop engaging and inclusive environments.

My particular research study focuses on lived experiences of mid-level Student Services leaders such as Deans, Associate Deans, Directors, Assistant Directors, etc. Participants in this study must meet the following criterion:

- Be employed by a California Community College
- Must be a mid-level leader such as a Dean, Associate Dean, Director, Assistant Director, etc. within Student Services.
- Have at least 3 years' experience as a mid-level leader

While being sensitive to your incredibly demanding calendar, I ask for a one-time, online approximately 45-minute interview. The scheduling of this interview will be done at your most convenient date and time. A short demographic survey will be conducted prior to the interview.

Sharing of your story, your lived experiences and your practices will add significantly to the understanding the lived experiences of mid-level Student Services leaders and culturally responsive practices within California Community Colleges. You are empowering the next generation of Student Services leaders. I am excited to listen to your stories!

Please reply to this email if you are interested in participating.

With gratitude,

Aman Kandola
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX G

1st Email Follow-up

Hello (First Name of Participant),

THANK YOU for being willing to be a part of this research study. I am excited at the opportunity to listen to your stories and to learn from you.

Here are the next two steps:

1) Review the Research Participants Bill of Rights

2) Review and sign the ***Informed Consent Form*** that should have already arrived in in your email inbox from me via PandaDoc. Here are directions to sign the document:
   - ☐ Click on Open Document
   - ☐ Click on Start
   - ☐ Type in your first and last name
   - ☐ Double Click on Signature box.
   - ☐ Click on Accept and Sign
   - ☐ Click on Finish

You will receive a signed copy of the Informed Consent Form after both you and I have signed the form.

If you have any questions about either of these documents, please do not hesitate to contact me by calling/texting me at 530-315-2944 or by simply replying to this email.

Once I have received the signed Informed Consent Form, I will be reaching out to you to setup a date and a time that works best for you for the interview. I am truly grateful to you for your willingness to be a part of this research study. YOU are moving the needle forward in supporting diverse staff and students.

Aman Kandola
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX H

2nd Email Follow-up

Hello (First Name of Participant),
I am so thrilled and honored to hear your stories and your experiences during the interview which is scheduled for:
Date:
Time:
Zoom link:
I have sent you a calendar invite for our Zoom interview and will provide a reminder prior to our interview date and time.
Please complete the following short steps PRIOR to our interview:

1) Complete this short Demographic Survey

2) Watch this short THANK YOU video!

3) The Interview Questions are available for you to preview. Please know that all information gathered in this study that identifies you and your institution will be kept confidential and protected to the limits allowed by law. This affords us the opportunity to have an authentic interview without worry.

Sharing of your story, your lived experiences and your practices will add significantly to the understanding the lived experiences of mid-level Student Services leaders and culturally responsive practices within California Community Colleges. I am honored and excited to listen to your stories and learn from you.

Sincerely,

Aman Kandola
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX I

Aman Kandola <kand7201@mail.umassglobal.edu>

IRB Application Approved As Submitted: Amandeep Kandola

1 message

Institutional Review Board <my@umassglobal.edu> Fri, Apr 8, 2022 at 7:36 AM
Reply-To: webmaster@umassglobal.edu
To: kand7201@mail.umassglobal.edu
Cc: jlee1@umassglobal.edu, vsmithsa@brandman.edu, irb@umassglobal.edu

Dear Amandeep Kandola,

Congratulations, your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board. This approval grants permission for you to proceed with data collection for your research. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If any issues should arise that are pertinent to your IRB approval, please contact the IRB immediately at IRB@umassglobal.edu. If you need to modify your IRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at the following link: https://irb.umassglobal.edu/Applications/Modification.pdf.

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank you,
Doug DeVore, Ed.D.
Professor
Organizational Leadership
IRB Chair
ddevore@umassglobal.edu
www.umassglobal.edu

APPENDIX J

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 21-May-2020
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 36703265

This is to certify that:

Amandeep Kandola

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TrainACEterate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

Human Subjects Research (Curriculum Group)
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Brandman University

CITI

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w3725c278-ca71-436b-a54c-e2d85d69a096-36703265