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Identifying Success Strategies for Hmong American Students in Higher Education

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University of the Pacific

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Identifying Success Strategies for Hmong American Students in Higher Education

By

Jason Xiong

A Dissertation Submitted to the

Graduate School

In Partial Fulfillment of the

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University of the Pacific
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2023

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By

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By

Jason Xiong

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife and kids – Thank you for your patience, support, love, and understanding during my academic journey in pursuit of achieving a higher education and being a model for you. Thank you for believing in me and helping me to see further and reach higher. Your beautiful faces, smiles, and laughter have given me the strength, motivation, encouragement, and inspiration to continue on my journey. I am blessed to have you in my life. To my parents – Thank you for caring and raising me to become the man you wanted me to be. Without your unconditional love and support, I wouldn't have made it this far. Ua tsuag.

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This dissertation was not possible without the moral, physical, and financial support from my wife and kids that allowed me the opportunity to pursue my educational goals. The patience you all have provided me as I worked through many late nights and weekends to meet the demands of a graduate program while balancing a life of work, school, and kids. The sacrifices you all made allowed me to pursue my educational goals and set an example for you. My dedication to my academic and personal development allowed me to finish something I did not think was possible.

My gratitude goes to the participants of this study. Thank you for your time and willingness to contribute your stories and experiences to build a foundation designed to uplift and strengthen the Hmong community. As we continue to assimilate in the United States of America, we hope to increase the total number of college graduates and build a community filled with accomplished and educated community members for the betterment of our society in which we will forever remain a part of this land we all now call home.

I would like to thank all the faculty members and staff from this program that believed in me and guided me through this journey. Dr. Brett Taylor, Dr. Fred Estes., Dr. Martin Martinez, and Dr. Delores McNair; your continued guidance and support helped me make this dream possible. Thank you.

IDENTIFYING SUCCESS STRATEGIES FOR HMONG AMERICAN STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Abstract

By Jason Xiong

University of the Pacific
2023

Hmong Americans' postsecondary completion rates remain low when compared to other Asian ethnic groups. As the Hmong population continues to grow, so does the need for intervention to increase the total number of postsecondary graduates. Many Hmong Americans are first-generation college students and continue to face challenges and barriers that prevent them from being successful in higher education. “Forty-seven and a half percent of Hmong adults (25 years or older) reported having attended college, but not earning a degree” (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2011). Without a college degree, Hmong Americans face limited resources and opportunities to advance in their careers, resulting in limited earning potential (Research Summary, n.d.). Without a college degree, career options are limited, and may result in low-wage jobs that perpetuate the poverty level of SEAAAs. (“Overview of the Educational Challenges of SEAA - 2013,” n.d.) Asian Americans continue to be successful in degree completion rates, masking the struggles of sub-ethnic groups that immigrated to America in the late 1970s to early 1980s as they assimilate into America. To address the issue of low completion rates of Hmong Americans, targeted services will aid and support them through their academic journey.

Many Hmong Americans begin their journey in higher education at a community college. Community colleges have been providing education and skills training helping to fill the needs

of high-demand industries. Community colleges have transformed millions of American lives paving the way to the middle class through middle-class careers (Holliefield-Hoyle & Hammons, 2015, pg. 29). Attrition rates of Hmong Americans remain a primary concern in postsecondary institutions. Primary causes of attrition include inadequate financial support, unsolidified academic decisions, and life interruptions (Bowers et al., 2019, pg. 2). As colleges strive to provide resources to alleviate some of these barriers, many students do not utilize these services (Bowers et al., 2019, pg.2).

The purpose of this study was to identify success strategies of Hmong Americans that completed their undergraduate degrees and beyond to provide information to current and future Hmong Americans as they pursue their degree. These strategies helped the participants as they discover new things while learning to balance school, work, children, and cultural obligations. Through a basic general qualitative study, the research identified the following themes: 1) First-Generation College Students; 2) Counseling; 3) Connection with Professors 4) Connection with colleagues; 5) Library; 6) Tutoring; 7) Personal growth. Much research is needed to continue the research into other successful measures Hmong Americans have used to complete their undergraduate degrees and beyond. This research contributes toward the growing research into successful strategies used by Hmong Americans and other students in America as the information gathered from this research will aid all postsecondary students.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Education is a journey that leads to feelings of empowerment and accomplishment. The journey of students in higher education institutions is filled with many successes and challenges. When the campus environment is not socially or culturally supportive of people of color and first-generation college students (FGCS), there is the added risk of mental health deterioration from seclusion and a sense of belonging (Kundu, 2019). The negative experiences in higher education greatly impact their journey toward degree completion and result in attrition. Asian Americans are academically successful when compared to other ethnic groups and are often overlooked because of the misperception that they do not need academic support and are overrepresented in higher education (Her, 2014). The aggregation of data on the student success of Asian Americans masks the disparities in achievement and degree attainment across Asian ethnic groups (B. Ngo & Lee, 2007). Asian Americans as a whole ethnic group have a high rate of degree completion. “The image of Asian American students as model minorities is supported by much of the academic research on Asian American students” (B. Ngo & Lee, 2007). This masks the unique and nuanced experiences of sub-ethnic Asian groups and contributes towards the widening wealth gap between Hmong Americans and other ethnic groups with Southeast Asians (Hmong, Cambodian, & Laotian) with a median income of \$53,000 compared to Filipino Americans' median income of \$80,000 (Shih et al., 2019). Although many people do succeed in earning a livable wage without a college degree, studies have shown those with a bachelor’s degree earn much more in their lifetime when compared to those without an undergraduate degree (Torpey, n.d.). Men with a bachelor’s degree earn approximately \$900,000 more in

median lifetime earnings and women earn \$630,000 more than high school graduates. (Research Summary, n.d.) The importance of obtaining an undergraduate degree continues to rise while the problem of student retention is increasingly costly to individuals, families, and universities (Wright et al., 2012).

Given that "obtaining a college degree (...) translates into substantially greater lifetime income and wealth" and, with the rising costs of attending four-year institutions, "low-income and students of color are (...) graduating in deep debt" (Shapiro, Mschede, and Osoro, 2013,5) Thus making community colleges an especially opportune option for the most financially vulnerable students (Teranishi et al., 2015).

Not only is earning a bachelor's degree more valuable, but it also impacts future generations. This is especially important for Hmong American postsecondary students as many are FGCS. The impact it will have on future generations will allow them to succeed through the knowledge and experiences of their parents (Xiong & Lam, 2013). This will hopefully contribute towards the total number of bachelor's degree conferred for Hmong Americans in the United States. The next sections will include in the following order: background, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, significance, theoretical/conceptual framework, methodology, delimitations, researcher perspective/positionality, definitions, and chapter summary.

Background

According to the United States Census (2019), African Americans make up 13.4%; American Indians and Alaskan Natives make up 1.3%; Asians make up 5.9%; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders make up 0.2%; and Hispanic or Latinos make up 18.3% totaling 39.1%. Recent demographic projections by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher

Education (WICHE) show that Latino/a and Asian American populations will witness the largest growth, particularly in public secondary schools (Pak, Maramba, & Hernandez, n.d.). People of color are enrolling at higher education institutions, but many will not make it past their first year. Researchers identified several factors that explain the academic gap such as stereotype threat (feelings of a negative image) and the threat of feeling like they belong (feelings of an outsider in a group) (Isik et al., 2018). Confidence is a key contributor to college success. When you feel insecure along with feelings of isolation, you start to feel like you don't belong at the institution. Spaces are critical for students to develop a sense of belonging. With feelings of not belonging, it affects their academic success (Museus et al., 2016). Physical cultural connections, epistemological cultural connections, and transformational cultural connections also influenced students' levels of acceptance, sense of belonging, and satisfaction in college (Museus et al., 2016). Physical cultural connections occur when students were able to connect with individuals and groups from their cultural communities on campus while epistemological cultural connections occur when campuses enable students to acquire and share knowledge about their cultural identities (Museus et al., 2016). Transformational cultural connections occur when college campuses provide students with opportunities to give back to positively transform their cultural communities (Museus et al., 2016).

Community colleges have been providing education and skills training helping to fill the needs of high-demand industries. Community colleges have transformed millions of American lives paving the way to the middle class through middle-class careers (Holliefield-Hoyle & Hammons, 2015, pg. 29). As people of color populations continue to rise, they are growing in the representation of vocational or lower education tracks while underrepresented in higher education (Isik et al., 2018, pg. 1). The underperformance of people of color have attracted

attention across disciplines. As we continue to grow into a global economy, the work environment continues to evolve, forcing the United States to increase its human capital to remain economically competitive (Teranishi, 2012, pg. 16). If the United States is to be a global competitor, we must do more to increase the completion rates for people of color to help fill this need. We can accomplish this through the consciousness of all people of color in national, state, and system-wide policy considerations, as well as the development of campus services and programs to promote and support college success for minority students (Teranishi, 2012, pg. 16).

In 2010, the estimate for enrolled first-generation college students in the United States was estimated to be 4.5 million (Schelbe et al., 2019, pg. 1). First-generation students are four times more likely than their peers to drop out at the end of their first year in college (Schelbe et al., 2019, pg. 1). Attrition rates of Hmong Americans remains a primary concern in postsecondary institutions. Primary causes of attrition include inadequate financial support, unsolidified academic decisions, and life interruptions (Bowers et al., 2019, pg. 2). People of color such as African Americans experience resistance, alienation, and a culture that is dissimilar to one which they are accustomed to, resulting in a lack of sense of belonging (Owens et al., 2010, pg. 293). These experiences are similar to Hmong Americans in higher education. Some students come to college unprepared for college-level work and have difficulty understanding the complexities of the higher education system. As colleges strive to provide resources to alleviate some of these barriers, many students do not utilize these services (Bowers et al., 2019, pg.2). Student services include academic tutoring centers, EOP&S, UMOJA, Puente, TRiO, Veterans Center, and counseling services designed to help get students through their journey. Studies have found first-generation students are more likely to come from lower socioeconomic families (Schelbe et al., 2019, pg. 62). Unfortunately, higher education's understanding of how to serve

low-income college students is limited and ignores the role of socioeconomic status as a contributing factor in the failure of people of color (Hollifield-Hoyle & Hammons, 2015, pg. 30).

Other studies have shown that proactive counseling has proven an effective method with people of color to prevent attrition (Bowers et al., 2019, pg. 3). There are several things counselors can do in this regard, such as listening to the perspectives of these students, willingness to discuss racism and discrimination, explaining the importance of networking with faculty and alumni, encouraging students to join professional & student organizations, and assistance on managing and negotiating relationships with other individuals throughout the institution (Owens et al., 2010, pg. 295). Studies have also shown that social support through a sense of connection, belonging, and relationship satisfaction are identified factors in the retention of first-generation students (Schelbe et al., 2019, pg. 63). Student support programs are created to support the needs of underserved, people of color, first-generation, and students of color. They create a space in which these populations can come to create and build relationships among their peers while receiving essential services to succeed. California Community Colleges have many student support programs that target students of color, underserved communities, first-generation, homeless students, and foster youth (Support Services | California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.). Some examples of these programs are the Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOP&S), UMOJA, Puente, Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) program, CalWORKs. Other types of student support also aim to improve the outcomes of people of color. As students begin to think about their careers, many do not know where to start. Many people of color would greatly benefit from career guidance.

Career counseling plays a significant role in the succession of underrepresented students in higher education. Some underrepresented students need help in developing & enhancing their

career capital to secure internships, pursue a career, research graduate schools, and finance an advanced degree (Means et al., 2016 ,pg. 95). Underrepresented students will benefit greatly from these services, but many are reluctant to seek such services. Better outreach targeting these populations will impact attrition rates among underrepresented students and increase retention. In a study of underrepresented students instructing students about the transition from college to career, a program was created to help this population plan for their future. The study found significant improvements in the student's understanding of how to transition from college to career through job searching, preparation for graduate school, personal budgeting, and the importance of personal values in their career interests (Means et al., 2016, pg. 97).

Problem Statement

Higher education teaches knowledge and skills to all students from all ethnic, religious, and racial backgrounds. Although Hmong Americans enroll in higher education at high rates, many fail to finish (Xiong, n.d.) resulting in attrition. “Forty-seven and a half percent of Hmong adults (25 years or older) reported having attended college, but not earning a degree” (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2011). Without a college degree, Hmong Americans face limited resources and opportunities to advance in their careers, resulting in limited earning potential (Research Summary, n.d.). Without a college degree, career options are limited, and may result in low-wage jobs that perpetuate the poverty level of SEAAAs. (“Overview of the Educational Challenges of SEAA - 2013,” n.d.) Currently, few colleges or universities examine the experiences of Hmong Americans to fully understand the type of support that is needed to ensure the successful completion of their degree. There is little to no research conducted on attrition rates of Hmong Americans in higher education. The lack of research on attrition rates of Hmong American rates will make it difficult to identify

solutions to decrease attrition and increase degree attainment rates. With many Hmong Americans entering college unprepared or unaware of how to navigate the systems of higher education, many may fall through the cracks when left alone to try and figure it out. The lack of proper student support services for Southeast Asian Americans impacts a successful academic journey (Museus et al., 2016). This is especially alarming for Hmong American students who often reside in low-income neighborhoods that lack access to high-quality educational resources and services along with SEAA educators and staff (“Overview of the Educational Challenges of SEAA - 2013,” n.d.). Attrition is a major concern for higher education institutions, with many researching best practices to support and retain Hmong Americans. When you look dropout rates by gender, SEAA males were more likely to leave college without completing a degree when compared to SEAA females (Xiong, n.d.). Attrition rates of Hmong Americans at postsecondary institutions remain a constant concern. As Hmong Americans are often lumped into the larger ethnic group of Asians, they are often overlooked and underserved and allocating resources to other areas or ethnic groups.

Enrollment of Hmong Americans in higher education continues to decline each year. In the California State University system, Hmong American enrollment went from 3,579 students in 2016 to 3,085 in 2019, a difference of 494 students. (California State University, n.d.-b) Total Bachelor’s degrees attained by Hmong Americans in the CSU system increased from 540 in 2015 to 649 in 2019, a difference of 109. (California State University, n.d.-a) The percentage of Hmong American Bachelor’s degree graduates for 2016 was 16.87 percent of total enrollment and 21.03 percent. The Bachelor’s degree attainment rates of Hmong Americans remain one of the lowest when compared to other SEAA ethnic groups and all other ethnic groups (California State University, n.d.-a).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to understand the needs and identify success factors contributing towards the completion of a bachelor's degree or higher. This study will capture the success stories of Hmong American students that have transferred from a community college and transferred to a four-year university where they earned their bachelor's degree. The study will also capture motivating factors perceived that heavily influenced their determination to finish college programs attended through a qualitative study.

Research Questions

The research questions I am going to explore are the following:

1. What factors perceived successfully aided Hmong American college students to transfer from community college to a four-year university?
2. Were there any college programs or interventions that Hmong students contributed toward the student's success? If so, which college programs?
3. What individual motivations, strengths, skills, or abilities did the Hmong American college students student credit for their success and persistence?

Significance

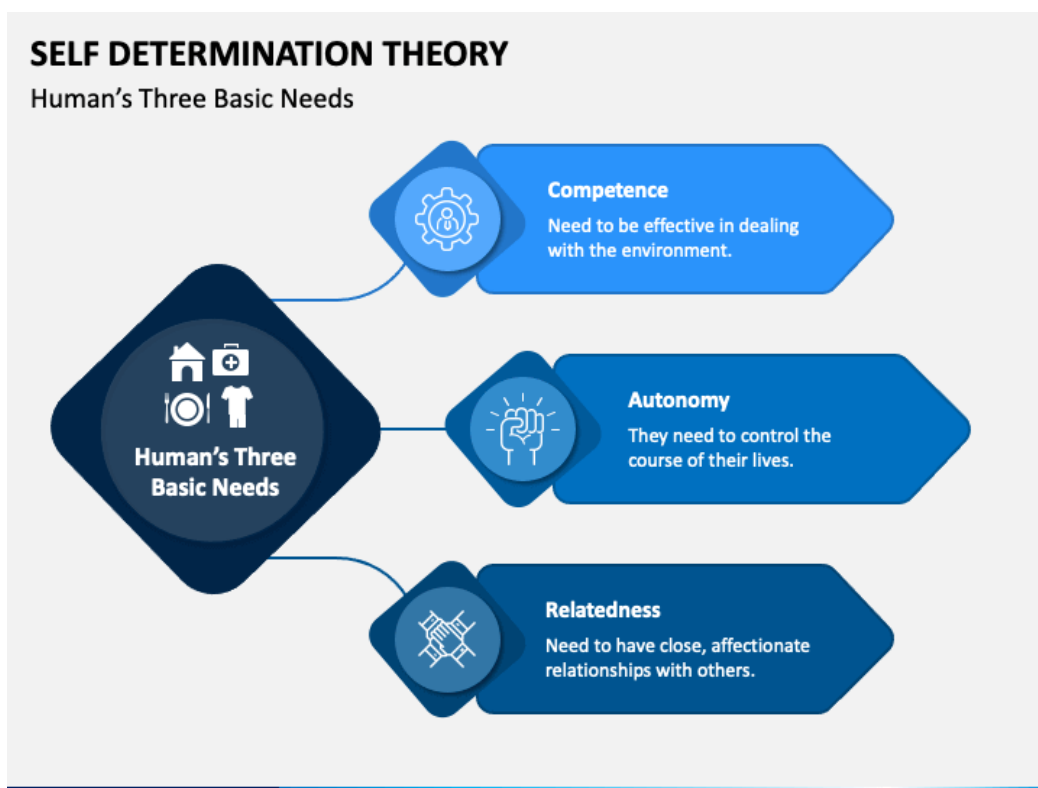
There have been numerous studies on the causation of attrition rates among people of color groups along with the success stories. As people of color continue to enroll in higher education at high rates, completion rates of people of color still lag behind their Caucasian peers ("Race and Ethnicity of U.S. Undergraduates," n.d.). The significance of this study is to help people of color successfully complete their academic goals and transition toward their careers. By addressing the problem of attrition rates, this study hopes to identify student support services attributable to successful completion and/or transfer.

Student support services have been at the forefront of ensuring academic success. As many people of color enter community college, they all plan to succeed. Along their journey,

some will not make it to graduation or transfer. Without knowledge of available student support services, those unaware of help and need assistance will drop out. Intimidation and fear sometimes play a role in obtaining the help needed to succeed. Reflecting on my own experience, navigating through higher education at both the community college level and four-year university level, there are so many people that it can be intimidating to get help. Student support services marketing will help to capture those who have questions and need proper guidance toward degree completion. These experiences are common among all students, but those who lack the confidence to overcome their fear of judgment will end up failing. This study will investigate what support services helped people of color to successfully graduate from a community college and transfer to a four-year university.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

The conceptual/theoretical framework for this dissertation is Self-Determination Theory. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is driven by three innate and universal psychological needs: competence, connection, and autonomy (Cherry, 2019). It was founded by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan who developed the theory of motivation suggesting that people are driven by a need to grow and feel fulfilled. Self-Determination Theory suggests that the tendency to be either proactive or passive is largely influenced by the social conditions in which they were raised with social support being key. People can be intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to learn new things with those intrinsically motivated show enjoyment and satisfaction when learning and utilizing their capabilities (Isik et al., 2018). Self-efficacy is a person's belief in themselves that they can be successful when carrying out a particular task (Self-Efficacy, n.d.) This ties in with competence; the need to be effective when dealing with the environment.

Figure 1*Self-Determination Theory*

The framework helped to identify the motivating factors of Hmong American college students that lead to their successful transfer from a community college to a four-year university where they earned their bachelor's degree. Through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the study looked at how Hmong American students feel knowing the challenges ahead and how they pushed through to transfer to a four-year university and earned their bachelor's degree. What motivating factors or strategies are employed to successfully navigate through challenges such as self-belonging, stereotype threat, racism, the feeling of autonomy (due to helplessness in influencing exam results), competence (due to lower performance), and relatedness (feelings of being singled out).

The framework also helped to identify the three innate and psychological needs that were fulfilled as they went through their academic journey that was proven to be successful or helpful.

The framework was applied through interviews with Hmong American college students that successfully transferred to a four-year university from a community college and earned their bachelor's degree. Through the narratives of the participants, SDT defines strategies on how to cope and endure their higher education journey. The insight from the interviews will help shape future student support services, programs, or counseling to ensure that Hmong American students in higher education are provided ample support and counseling throughout their academic journey.

Methodology

The methodology that I used for this study is a general qualitative study through interviews to collect data for analysis. Participants of this study have successfully transferred from a community college to a four-year college and earned their bachelor's degree. Recognizing the unique and growing needs of people of color, institutions have developed student support programs to improve the retention and academic success of these students. The participants were selected from various cities across the United States with the hopes of capturing unique experiences in distinct locations. This included diverse experiences at different higher education institutions to increase awareness and knowledge of various student support programs to aid Hmong American students at their respective universities.

Delimitations/Assumptions

The delimitations of this study attempted to explain the phenomena of people of color's success in higher education. The study also attempted to identify motivating factors that heavily influenced the pursuit of their higher education academic goals. This study will not be able to explain every contributing factor to their success but will provide insight into the strategies used to employ success. The other limitation of this study is students must have attended community college for at least one academic school year (Fall to Spring). The data gained from this study will help to develop student support programs and policies that will nurture people of color to improve graduation rates.

Researcher Perspective/Positionality

As a student of color and a first-generation college student, I understand that my experience in higher education may be similar to or vastly different from the participants of my study. I recognize that being a first-generation college student (FGCS) may differ from the status of my participants. The participants of my study were all first-generation college students. Working in education, I work directly with students of all backgrounds. Working with students from all backgrounds, religions, cultures, ethnicity, and abilities, I hear and understand many of the challenges students face in higher education. In my professional role, I have access to more information but not the background of the student. Although this may not always be clear in their profiles, there is a common theme that often emerges more than I anticipated. Through my professional experience, I continue to learn and grow through the opportunities of advising students. In my privileged role, I understand I will have access to student records, but the participants from my study will not be from the school district where I am currently employed or from any future institution where I may be employed.

Definitions

Academic Advisor

A full-time, professional staff member who individually assists students with their course plans and college progress. They advise students on what classes to take, as well as other opportunities. (USC, 2020)

ASHÉ Center

The mission of the ASHÉ Center (pronounced “ah-SHAY”) is to enhance the educational experience for students of African descent at Sacramento City College. The ASHÉ Center’s efforts focus on promoting cultural, social, physical, and mental development for students of African descent, resulting in the enrichment of the entire community (Sacramento City College, 2020)

Attrition

The people who leave an educational or training course before it has finished (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020)

Bachelor’s Degree

A four-year degree obtained at a college or university. After you complete your degree requirements, you will have earned a bachelor’s degree. (USC, 2020)

CARE

The Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) Program promotes students' success by offering specialized services to EOPS students who are single parents receiving public assistance (CalWORKs/TANF) (Bakersfield College, 2020)

CalWORKs

CalWORKs (California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Children) is California's Welfare plan in response to Federal TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families) Program (Bakersfield College, 2020)

People of color

A person whose skin pigmentation is other than and especially darker than what is considered characteristic of people typically defined as white (Merriam-Webster, 2022)

EOP&S

Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOP&S) is a state-funded program that serves educationally and financially disadvantaged students. EOP&S provides services that assist students who have the potential to succeed in college. (Bakersfield College, 2020)

First-generation student

Students whose parents do not have four-year degrees (USC, 2020)

General Education

The General Education program comprises a series of liberal arts courses that all students, regardless of their majors, are required to complete. Courses are designed to ensure that you are knowledgeable about a broad range of topics and will graduate as a well-rounded individual. Students take one to two courses in each of the eight categories to satisfy the requirements. (USC,2020)

Higher education

Education at a college or university where subjects are studied at an advanced level (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020)

Puente Project

The mission of the Puente Project is to increase the number of educationally disadvantaged students who enroll in four-year colleges and universities, earn college degrees, and return to their communities as mentors and leaders to future generations (Sacramento City College, 2020)

Major

A student's main focus of study. Students must take a required set of courses to complete a major. A student earns a bachelor's degree in this particular field of study. (USC, 2020)

Minor

An academic area in which a student can choose to study. Typically requires less of a time commitment than a major (16-24 units). (USC,2020)

Motivation

Willingness to do something or something that causes such willingness (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020)

RISE

RISE stands for Respect, Integrity, Self-determination & Education. RISE is a support service for students where we go beyond to ease the transition from high school to community college. We believe in emphasizing to our students the importance of achieving higher education through transfer. Rise takes the "family approach" for SCC students to feel welcomed on campus (Sacramento City College, 2020).

Self-Determination Theory

- a) people can become self-determined when their needs for competence, connection, and autonomy are fulfilled (VeryWell Mind, 2019)
- b) people can be intrinsically motivated to learn new things and students who are intrinsically motivated show enjoyment and satisfaction when learning and utilizing their capabilities (Isik et al., 2018)

Southeast Asian

Bruneian, Burmese, Cambodian, Filipino, Hmong, Indonesian, Laotian, Malaysian, Mien, Papua New Guinean, Singaporean, Timorese, Thai, and Vietnamese (Y. Pak et al., 2014)

Student Support Services

Foster positive relationships among educators and students, thereby increasing students' attachment to school, and serve as an essential link between students and, their families and school resources and community-based health and social services (State of New Jersey DOE, 2020)

Success

The achieving of the results wanted or hoped for (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020)

TRiO

Federal outreach and student services programs are designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (US Department of Education, 2020)

UMOJA

Umoja is a Kiswahili word meaning unity and focusing on the importance of togetherness among family and members of a community (Solano Community College, 2020)

Summary

Higher education continues to be an equalizer for people of color. As many enroll and complete their degrees, their lifetime earning potential is higher than those with a high school diploma (Research Summary, n.d.). For people of color, many do not complete their programs and fail to live up to their full potential. Those who go on and finish their undergraduate degrees and/or beyond, mark a change in their trajectory and for those that follow; paving a way for people of color to advance academically and professionally. Student support services continue to provide valuable service to underserved and underrepresented communities. The space they provide allows people of color to obtain the academic counseling necessary to finish their degrees and transfer. A space that welcomes and supports students of color, underrepresented, underserved, first-generation, and people of color to achieve college-educated status and instills in them confidence, self-efficacy, grit, and tenacity to accomplish whatever they choose. Through the narratives of people of color, we explore motivating factors through self-determination that led to the success of degree completion. The next chapter will provide you with the introduction, background on immigrating to the United States, theoretical framework, gaps, college and career readiness, community colleges, academic support, cultural connection, social capital, and conclusion.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Higher education remains an important milestone for many Americans and continues to serve as a strong indicator of accomplishment. Higher education degree attainment is a measure of success. With such high value placed on having a college degree, higher education degree attainment rates of Southeast Asian Americans remain low in the United States. According to a study (Museus et al., 2016) approximately 59% of all first-year college students enrolled in four-year institutions complete a bachelor's degree within six years. The degree attainment rate for Southeast Asians remains low when compared to the majority and other ethnic groups. Vietnamese (26%), Hmong (14%), Cambodian (13%), and Laotian (12%) graduate within six years when entering straight into a four-year university. In contrast to the assumption and high percentages of Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) students enrolled at prestigious colleges and universities in the United States, the majority of AAPI students are concentrated in community colleges (as cited in Vang, 2018). The disparities are hard to ignore. The "model minority" myth underscores the critical need for research and academic support with the Southeast Asian American & Pacific Islander communities (Museus, Shiroma, & Dizon, 2016). Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander populations continue to be lumped into the larger ethnic group as Asians, which includes South Asians and East Asians resulting in viewing Asians as all successful in careers and academically. The failure to finish college results in growing negative effects on American society such as: 1) increased incarceration rates; 2) higher rates of unemployment; 3) lower levels of academic preparation among future generations; 4) lower civic participation and 5) decreased tax revenues (Museus & Ravello, 2021).

The path to improving the success rate of Southeast Asian students is a high priority. Working as an academic advisor, my goal is to guide students successfully on their academic journey. As they matriculate to colleges and universities across the United States, many Southeast Asian students may require more assistance and guidance. Only 14% of Hmong American students matriculate at a 4-year university and complete a bachelor's degree in 6 years. (Museus, Shiroma, & Dizon, 2016) Academic barriers of Hmong American students continue to affect the outcomes of degree attainment. According to Xiong & Lam (2012), there are many difficulties in navigating the higher education system. Not many students are aware of what General Education courses were and the requirements to earn their degree. Coupled with the lack of experience with counseling support, students may become lost in the complexities of higher education that require proper guidance to be on the correct pathway toward degree completion (Xiong & Lam, 2012). The lack of use of on-campus services for Hmong American students in higher education can be detrimental to their goals. For those that used support from counselors, they were very grateful. As students matriculate to higher education, college preparedness will be a strong indicator of success.

Immigrants from Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands came in waves since the 1965 Immigration Act as a diverse population ranging from educated professionals to refugees. The majority of Southeast Asians immigrated to the United States during the post-1975 immigration wave and were from lesser-educated and poorer backgrounds. Many refugees were Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao, and Hmong, to escape the dire conditions of their homeland (Lew et al., 2005; F. Ngo & Sablan, 2019). The Hmong are an ethnic group that lived in the highland areas of Laos and Thailand. Their history before Southeast Asia is unknown as much of their

written history has been destroyed but is survived by the culture and traditions they carried on in their new environment.

Hmong Americans have called America home since their immigration in the early 1970s as refugees during the Vietnam War. The history of the Hmong has been erased throughout history with traces of Hmong living in China before they migrated to Southeast Asia. The written history of our culture and language has been destroyed as they've migrated to other countries. The Hmong population continues to adapt to their environment while maintaining their religious traditions and cultural identity. The Hmong ethnic group is resilient and will adapt to any environment. As they migrate to different areas, many assimilate and become a part of their new country while keeping their ethnic identity and practicing cultural traditions. The cultural and religious traditions pass on to future generations as the Hmong population continues to grow in the United States and throughout the world. Many Hmong Americans are proud of their heritage and continue their traditional annual New Year celebrations regardless of where they live with each new generation teaching and sharing the cultural knowledge to keep the traditions alive and ongoing.

Immigrating to the United States

The first Asian immigration group to the United States was Filipinos, who migrated to North America via Spanish ships in 1763 with the Chinese immigrants in the next wave to immigrate to the US during the gold rush era in the 1850s (Le, 2018). The first wave of Southeast Asians to arrive in the US was during the 1970s after the secret war in Vietnam ended. Since 1975, many Hmong fled Laos due to the political turmoil and war and the majority resettled in the United States (Xiong & Lam, 2013). Prior to the Hmong fleeing their homeland in Laos, they served as American combatants for the Central Intelligence Agency's secret

military efforts against the communist regimes in Laos (Yang, 2021). They aided Americans in the secret war in Laos and Vietnam navigating the terrain and strategically planning and fighting against the communist regime. Before the secret war in Laos, there was an estimated population of 300,000 Hmong residing in Laos (Yang, 2021). The resettlement efforts in America for the Hmong refugees were not an easy transition. Being placed throughout the United States in Minnesota, California, Texas, Washington, and many others, the Hmong population was scattered in different areas. Some resided in large cities while others were placed in rural parts of different states. The cultural shock became a barrier to many Hmong refugees as they adjust and adapt the life in the United States. There was also a language barrier that made it difficult to adjust to their new environment as many were non-English speaking and preliterate (Yang, 2021).

As the Hmong escaped the dangers of their homeland, they are now faced with a new challenge: settling in a foreign country where they do not speak the language. The largest Hmong population is found in California, Minnesota, Washington, and Wisconsin (F. Ngo & Sablan, 2019). As immigrants to the United States, language remains an academic barrier with many Southeast Asian households do not speak English as their primary language. Their native language is still the primary language and communication method in Southeast Asian households. This results in the need for remedial college courses, which prolongs their academic study. As a result, many immigrant students experience academic difficulties due to their language barrier (Creighton, 2012). As the Asian American Pacific Islander population is projected to reach 33 million by 2050, it is important to review the disaggregated data to ensure policies and educators better understand the needs of the Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander populations to ensure their needs are met and increase degree completion rates (as cited in Vang,

2018). Previous studies focused on degree attainment at a four-year university, but many neglected the experiences of Southeast Asian students who started from a community college. Ngo and Sablan (2019) sought to understand community college progress milestones, such as enrollment, completion of gatekeeper courses, degree attainment, and transferable credits (Ngo & Sablan, 2019). Using transcript data from a large California community college district, the disaggregated data of Southeast Asian students allowed the researchers to focus on the momentum toward completion milestones. Hmong Americans continue to assimilate in the United States as future generations carry on traditions brought over by their parents. The familial obligations remain the same for many Hmong American students as they learn to balance family, school, and work. Often this creates a conflict between the parents and the students as many are taught to respect their elders and always put their family first before their needs. This is a practice common among many Hmong American households and continues to this day. As Hmong Americans adjust to their new country, many are still struggling to find the right balance between family, school, work, and their personal lives. With many familial obligations, many Hmong American students end up withdrawing from their academic journeys to work and earn a wage to aid in supporting the family. These are common struggles among many Hmong American men and women in the United States. With these challenges, many Hmong American students find that attending a community college that is closer to home will allow them to support their family while pursuing their degree. Many Hmong Americans choose to work and earn a wage to survive while sacrificing their educational ambitions to provide for their families and parents. Though Hmong Americans continue to enroll in college, many choose to pursue occupations that require little to no education seeing education not as valuable as earning a salary and providing for their families prioritizing family over education.

Another shocking statistic shows that over 40% of Asian American undergraduates enrolled in higher education institutions attend community colleges. (Park & Assalone, 2019, Ngo & Sablan, 2019, Pak et al., 2014). Their study titled *Over 40%: Asian Americans and the Road(s) to Community Colleges* sought to find out the key reasons why Asian American students enroll in community colleges. As enrollment of Asian Americans in community colleges increase, how can we ensure they are successful and persist in postsecondary institutions? Approximately 30% of Southeast Asian Americans aged 25 and over have less than a high school degree. Academic barriers such as understanding how to navigate the higher education system may be a contributor to low degree attainment rates of Hmong American students (Xiong & Lam, 2013). Other factors impacting Southeast Asian American students are the social, economic, cultural, and academic contexts that leave them vulnerable to various risk factors associated with dropping out, stopping out, and being pushed out of higher education institutions (Y. K. Pak et al., 2014). These risk factors include but are not limited to being the first member of one's family to attend college; caring for dependent family members; working full-time; enrolled in college part-time; paying for college through government and private loans; and being a non-native English speaker (Y. K. Pak et al., 2014). Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander college students from low-income households are usually expected to work from 15 to 50 hours per week to help support their families in addition to attending classes. (as cited in Creighton, 2012). With many Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander families relying on support from their college-going children, this is an additional layer of stress and pressure.

Community College Transfers

Community college has long been the gateway for many students into higher education. For many students, community college is the first step towards earning your degree. Community

college has been a major part of the pathways toward earning your bachelor's degree. According to research, from "2015 to 2016, 49 percent of students who completed a baccalaureate degree attended a community college at least once within the previous ten years" (Hayes et al., 2020). The majority of first-generation immigrant and refugee students get their first step in postsecondary education through community college. They are a valuable resource of educational opportunity and an alternative to four-year colleges (Leo, 2021). Select community colleges also offer bachelor's degree programs in select industries. This allowed students to gain the degree and skills they need to begin work immediately after graduation in high-demand industries. Despite the promise of the community college pathway to a four-year university, many students start at a community college and fewer than 35% do so within six years (Hayes et al., 2020; Jabbar et al., 2021). Community college transfer rates have traditionally remained below 50% and as of 2016, only a third of community college students transferred to four-year institutions, and among that, only 42% completed their diploma within six years (Leo, 2021). What began as a starting point, became an obstacle that many do not transfer to a four-year university to earn their bachelor's degree. The complexity of transfer programs contributes to the low transfer rates of many students (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Jabbar et al., 2021). "The lack of clarity about their educational goals is one of the many hurdles that community colleges face in helping students successfully transfer to a four-year institution" (Community College Journal - February/March 2022 - Page 28, n.d.). Once a student identifies their plan to transfer to a four-year institution to earn their bachelor's degree, advisors place them on the right pathway to ensuring success. Academic advisers often ask students if they plan to transfer to ensure they are placed on the correct pathway to transfer. Not all college courses are transferrable, and this contributes to the confusion that a college class should be accepted at all universities, but that is a

misconception that confuses many students. It's a puzzle that many community college administrators are constantly working to address. A new initiative developed to tackle this problem called the Equity Transfer Initiative (ETI) aimed to increase transfer rates among underrepresented students. Participating community college and their four-year partner institutions are using grant resources to forge agreements to simplify the transfer process of credits between these institutions where they will ultimately earn their bachelor's degree (Community College Journal - February/March 2022 - Page 28, n.d.).

California community colleges (CCC) have many successes with students that transfer to a four-year and earn their bachelor's degree. California enrolls a large share of students in community college than other states; ensuring more transfer to a four-year institution to strengthen the economic security of California workers (Johnson & Mejia, n.d.). CCC is constantly directing attention and resources to improve the transfer pathways through community colleges. California Community Colleges are constantly working with four-year institutions to build systemwide agreements to help all transfer-eligible students make the transition (Johnson & Mejia, n.d.). With the creation of the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT), many students have benefitted from this program that guarantees acceptance into a California State University (CSU). Since inception in 2010 to 2020, they have awarded 119,505 Associate of Art for Transfer (AA-T) degrees and 98,106 Associate of Science (AS-T) degrees ("10 Years after Historic Transfer Reform: How Far Have We Come and Where Do We Need to Go?," 2020). Although much progress has been made, there are still many gaps in the transfer rates of CCC students. Only 19 percent of students indicate they hope to transfer successfully transfer within four years while 28 percent do so within six years. Another transfer pathway is the Transfer

Admission Guarantee (TAG) developed by the University of California institutions to aid in guaranteeing transfer to six of their nine campuses.

Many hurdles prevent students from successfully transferring to a four-year institution to earn their bachelor's degree. Four factors impact student transfer: 1) University affordability; 2) School-life balance; 3) Pathway navigation; and 4) Support network (Cooper et al., 2020). Finances are the biggest roadblock that transfer students experience regardless of age, gender, or racial/ethnic background with 75% of students citing university tuition as "very challenging" with nearly half listing it as the biggest challenge they consider when transferring (Cooper et al., 2020). The lack of institutional support can also set students back in their trajectories through contradictory advice regarding transfer and degree goals midway through the transfer process (Jabbar et al., 2019). Many students in higher education are juggling numerous and competing responsibilities in an effort to address financial shortfalls with 58% finding school and work responsibilities "very challenging" (Cooper et al., 2020). As students work through their courses at the community college, many miss accurate and timely information that impacts their transfer timeline and the time it takes to complete their bachelor's degree. Getting on the right transfer path from the beginning and knowing what to do is vital to the success of transferring to a four-year university. A lot of students are left confused and question whether they are taking the right classes. Counseling sessions focused on transferring were a top resource for students who successfully transferred with 77% of students who found this to be the top resource (Cooper et al., 2020). And lastly, 72% of students indicate that family support for their transfer goal is highly motivating with 67% of students reporting that support from their community college similarly impacts their drive to transfer (Cooper et al., 2020). The absence of social support

negatively impacts students' transfer decision-making and hinders many from transferring and earning their bachelor's degree.

Pretransfer and preparation have been a major part of student transfer success. Pre-transfer partnerships and pre-transfer advising between community colleges and four-year universities continue to expand strategies to support students through the transfer pipeline. Pre-transfer advising focuses on helping students to plan an education plan that will eventually result in the successful transfer to a four-year university (Hayes et al., 2020). Articulation guides are often used to disseminate information about the transfer process and course equivalencies at the destination school. They are extremely helpful in identifying course equivalencies that transfer ensuring completion of specific course requirements that meet the degree requirements of the student's major and or general education. Pre-transfer advising often has a positive influence on students' success in transfer. Students who receive advising and institutional support are more likely than those who did not receive advising to successfully transfer and persist in their enrollment (Jabbar et al., 2019). Pre-transfer advising remains a critical part of community college and continues to serve students whose plans are to transfer to a four-year institution. It is vital to identify these students so we can ensure they are taking the correct transferrable courses to meet the transfer requirements at their destination schools.

Given that so many community college students express a desire to transfer to a 4-year institutions but so few of these students achieve that goal; learning what conditions lead to successful student transfer — and which serve as barriers — may help craft interventions and policies to ensure more students meet their educational goals (Jabbar et al., 2019).

Community colleges continue to be valuable opportunities for students. As one of the least expensive institutions in higher education, many students see the value offered by the community college. With low tuition rates, students can get their start in college without the worry and fear of having to take student loans to attend college. These institutions cost approximately one-tenth of what a four-year institution costs (Leo, 2021). Another big draw to community colleges is the location as many are placed near their homes close to their parents and family. They can still earn credits that are transferrable to four-year institutions while saving on housing and other costs associated with student success. Community colleges will remain a gateway to higher education for many students and vital for those who are looking to remain close to home and save on tuition costs of four-year institutions. To ensure transfer success, there are many ways to help students in meeting their transfer goals. Every year, approximately 60,000 California community college students stop at the transfer gate, struggling to get to a university and reach their ultimate goal of earning a bachelor's degree (Cooper et al., 2020). Community colleges can take the lead in the efforts to ensure transfer success through a holistic approach to identify and proactively reach out to students who are planning to transfer or are close to transferring to get them through the gate to university.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework driving this research was Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (2021), SDT suggests that humans are driven by a need for growth to feel a sense of fulfillment. Self-Determination Theory within the educational context underlies human behavior because they are interesting (intrinsic motivation), consistent with their integrated beliefs or values, rather than for extrinsic reasons (Wang et al., 2020). In SDT, parents are viewed as socializing agents who are challenged with fostering autonomy-

supportive conditions to promote their children's self-determined motivation (Nerona, 2021).

The conditions in the home can be nurturing and supportive or the opposite. It is also said that in an autonomy-supportive home environment, parents acknowledge their children's feelings, provide rationale for rules and demands, and provide freedom to make their own choices within certain limits. (Nerona, 2021) Parents play a vital role in shaping or influencing the decisions of their children. In a home strongly supported by SDT, these children have a stronger chance of succeeding in higher education and life as determined by the basic needs of SDT.

SDT is driven by three innate and universal psychological needs: competence, connection, and autonomy. Deci and Ryan maintain that "autonomy incorporates competence and relatedness and that it is this combination that determines factors of motivation (Fradkin-Hayslip, 2021). Autonomy is a feeling of control and ownership. It is a feeling that you are free to do as you please. In the case of education, the feeling of independence from the choices made for you by your parents or peers. This freedom will allow you to freely explore and experience higher education as you deem satisfactory. Certain attitudes and behaviors have also been associated with feelings of autonomy (Fradkin-Hayslip, 2021). Competence is "the quality or state of having sufficient knowledge, judgment, skill, or strength (as for a particular duty or in a particular respect)" (Definition of COMPETENCE, n.d.) Relatedness has to do with affiliations one feels within an organization that allows one to form bonds or attachments with others and may result in relationships among the stakeholders (Fradkin-Hayslip, 2021). SDT suggests that being proactive or passive is largely influenced by the social conditions in which they were raised. College is a place of opportunity and personal growth. Through self-exploration, students begin to define their passion and pursue their goals. In a previous study, college students who show satisfaction with the three basic needs of SDT were predicted to show aspects

of psychological well-being and vocational commitment (Weigold et al., 2021). SDT continues to be a driver of college success as many students learn through their firsthand experiences, they continue to evolve and incorporate growth through the three innate and universal psychological needs competence, connection, and autonomy.

Table 1

Three Innate Psychological Needs



Gaps

Although there is a growing research interest in Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander college students, there continues to be a lack of research on Hmong American students in higher education. Specifically, research on examining the successful strategies of Hmong American college students is very limited. With little research conducted on Hmong American college students, this research contributes to the topic of Southeast Asians in higher education. Much research focuses on Asians as a whole but often ignores the subethnic groups. Much of the research literature tends to group Asian and Pacific Islanders into one monolithic ethnic group and does not distinguish between many of the subethnic groups. Asian American includes diaspora from East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent and sometimes lump Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders into one ethnic group as well. These generalizations can mask the stark inequality in postsecondary access and achievement (F. Ngo & Sablan, 2019). With aggregated data on Asian Americans in higher education, it appears that Asians are doing well overall in higher education, but that is only an illusion. The data presented on AAPI are a misrepresentation of the diversity within the Asian population and a false representation of overachievers (Vang, 2018). When you begin to break apart the data and comb through it, you begin to see a trend with Southeast Asians having the lowest degree attainment rates. A previous study found that disaggregated national data on education attainment rates reveal that Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese Americans have significantly lower rates of bachelor's degree attainment when compared to the general population (28%) and Asian American general population (50%.) (Truong & Miller, 2018). This may be a result of being first-generation college students where the majority of their native language is non-English. Research on Hmong Americans in higher education will allow educators, policymakers, and

researchers to identify the unique needs of Hmong American students in hopes of providing a solution to increase degree completion rates. As researchers disaggregate the data on Asian Americans in higher education, they begin to see the illusion has falsely misled them to believe that all Asians succeed in higher education. As the information unravels, the truth of the challenges SEAPI students experience in higher education will force the conversation of the needs of those who require immediate intervention in hopes of addressing their needs. This research hopes to expand on the lack of research on Hmong American students in higher education with further discussion on identifying successful strategies to increase the number of college graduates.

College and Career Readiness

College and career readiness are indicators of preparedness for the rigor of higher education. College readiness is defined as the level of preparation a student needs to succeed without taking remedial coursework (Uy et al., 2019). Academic preparedness is defined as having the academic knowledge and skills to do postsecondary-level coursework at 2-year or 4-year colleges without the need for remediation (Uy et al., 2019). There are many college and career readiness programs in secondary schools such as Advanced Placement, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP), Dual Enrollment, and Concurrent Enrollment to name a few. These programs were designed to prepare high school students for the rigors of post-secondary education. They also allow high school students to earn college and high school credits at the same time. Many of these programs also provide academic support and guidance for underserved communities. For example, AVID's mission is to "close the opportunity gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society" (AVID® / Closing the Opportunity Gap in Education,

n.d.). They have multiple ways of aiding students from diverse and underrepresented demographic groups across the nation. Over 76% of AVID seniors are from a low socioeconomic status background and 86% are underrepresented students. Also, 94% of AVID students complete four-year college entrance requirements with 90% who apply to a four-year university are accepted with 84% who enroll in college persist into their second year (AVID® / Closing the Opportunity Gap in Education, n.d.). These results are astounding. When you look at the demographics of participants, it paints an interesting picture. For example, the demographics of the participants in California show that majority of the students are White (70%) with only 6% of Asians participate in AVID (AVID® / Closing the Opportunity Gap in Education, n.d.). These numbers look troubling with so few Asians that partake in AVID. To achieve a higher success rate of college going Asian American students, many more would need to participate in AVID to receive the values provided through this program. Other college readiness or support programs such as Early Academic Outreach Program with the University of California have aided many students from socioeconomically disadvantaged students who are the first in their families to go to college. Created in 1976 by the University of California, EAOP aimed to increase the number of students from underserved schools and communities to have the opportunity to achieve a college education. EAOP is one of the largest and most successful Student Academic Preparation and Educational Partnership (SAPEP) programs, currently serving more than 40,000 students at more than 200 K-12 public schools throughout California each year (EAOP | About EAOP, n.d.). The program helps with various college preparation requirements such as completion of all University of California and/or California State University admissions requirements along with applying to colleges and financial aid. The information they provide and assistance to students have proven to successfully prepare high school students for college

and satisfy all entrance requirements to the universities. According to EAOP, 79% of EAOP 12th grade participants complete A-G coursework, compared to 49% of all California high school seniors and 67% of EAOP 12th grade complete the SAT or ACT, compared to 60% of non-participants at the same California public high schools (EAOP | About EAOP, n.d.).

Through the EAOP program, participants have access to a variety of college preparation information through academic advising, academic enrichment, standardized testing preparation, and knowledge about college. Equipped with this information, participants can get a head start on college and be prepared for the rigors of college, and have access to a supportive network.

These programs would greatly benefit the SEAPI communities and have a profound impact on college-going rates and persistence in college. Many SEAPI students are first-generation students whose parents are refugees and immigrated to the United States as part of the post-1975 wave of immigrants that fled the wars in Southeast Asia (F. Ngo & Sablan, 2019).

First-generation college students face many challenges as they enter postsecondary institutions. In a previous study (2019), researchers found that first-generation college students face retention and graduation challenges as many enter college less academically prepared; have completed fewer advanced-level courses; have a difficult time adapting to the stress and rigor of college; have different conceptions of the college experience; viewing college as a means of advancing socioeconomically; and have lower levels of self-esteem, social acceptance, creativity, and humor (Uy et al., 2019). Not only are many first-generation college students entering postsecondary institutions less prepared, but they must also learn to navigate the complex systems toward degree completion. In another study, researchers found that AAPI college students are more likely to be unaware of campus support services, have difficulty connecting to campus communities, have financial, personal or family obligations while in college, and feel

they are unable to turn to family for support and guidance (Uy et al., 2019). Further studies also found that female students and students of color are less likely to complete developmental math coursework than their peers (F. Ngo & Sablan, 2019). Awareness of student support programs in secondary school would aid in the preparations needed to transition to post-secondary education and eliminate the need for remedial courses. Increasing awareness of such programs will aid in the recruitment of SEAPI students in getting the help they need to successfully take college preparation courses and aid in ensuring they are meeting the requirements for college courses that apply towards their degree for transfer. College preparation courses help ensure preparation at the post-secondary level, but also student support programs once they have transitioned to higher education. Many student support programs on campus target specific ethnic and racial groups. Many of these programs were designed to support ethnic and racial student groups to ensure they successfully earn their degree and or transfer to a four-year university where they can earn their bachelor's and or graduate degrees.

Being unaware of campus support programs is a major concern, but also service access. Service access is defined as the perceived level of accessibility provided by campus services (Shumaker & Wood, 2016). This makes for a challenging transition from high school to college. The transition from high school to college or university would be less complex if Hmong American college students were aware of various programs such as dual enrollment in high school, which were designed to allow high school students the opportunity to experience college before graduating. This will provide them with early exposure and experience to grant an advantage to post-secondary education systems. Poor academic preparation may be a contributing factor to low levels of academic achievement in postsecondary education. (Karp, 2012). As students transition to higher education, many are faced with the reality of

independence where you are free to select any major and enroll in any course that piques your interest. Without proper guidance in higher education, you could be taking classes that do not fulfill the requirements for your major or general education. By introducing students to college while in high school, they will be exposed to the rigors, culture, environment, and behaviors of college-going students. Students also begin to learn about the expectations of college and being responsible for their learning (Karp, 2012). As more California high schools participate in dual enrollment, studies have shown those who participate in the program are more likely to graduate from high school and persist in college (Amour, 2020). A study by Wheelhouse, the Center for Community College Leadership and Research, found that 12.6 percent of public high school students in California participated in a dual-enrollment program (as cited in Amour, 2020). Although dual enrollment has been shown to increase the likelihood of persisting in college, many ethnic people of color do not participate in these programs.

In another study conducted by Uy, Kim, and Khuon (2019), the study focused on college and career readiness. The study consisted of surveys (n = 58) and focus groups (n = 35) of second-generation or immigrated as a youth. The study found that only 16 (28%) of Southeast Asian students participated in a dual-enrollment program (Uy et al., 2019). Dual enrollment may serve to help assist Southeast Asian Americans to persist in college by “trying on” the role of a college student through early exposure and practice, feeling comfortable in a college environment, and ultimately lead to a successful journey once they matriculate (Mechur Karp, 2012). Through the practice of a “college student,” students experience first-hand what it is like to be in college while learning the necessities of a successful college journey. By learning the importance of time management, stress management, and life/school balance, students persist in college once they matriculate. Dual-enrolled students get ready for college success by learning

all aspects of a college student through normative expectations; technical demands; how to do college-level work, habits; attitudes, and behaviors of successful college students; and discover successful strategies through learning from their peers (Mechur Karp, 2012).

In another study (Ngo & Sablan, 2019) of Southeast Asian students in community colleges revealed that not all Southeast Asian students were prepared for college. Reviewing transcript data on Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander students attending a California community college found through disaggregated data, Laotian, Cambodian, and Pacific Islander students have noticeably lower degree attainment rates. In a previous study, Southeast Asian immigrants are often academically under-prepared (Creighton, 2012). Southeast Asian students in higher education continue to show low percentages of degree attainment along with the academic preparedness necessary to persist and succeed in college. Often lumped into one ethnic group with other Asians, Southeast Asians continue to fall behind in their first-math course taken after taking their Math assessments (F. Ngo & Sablan, 2019).

Community Colleges

California has the largest Asian-Pacific American population of any state. With over 116 community colleges in California, it continues to serve many Asian and Pacific American students. The community college Asian-Pacific American student population is large and continues to grow each year. From 1980 to 2000, APA enrollment at the community college grew 224 percent from approximately 124,000 to 402,000 students (Lew et al., 2005). According to the California Community College (CCC) student demographics from 2017 to 2018, the Asian student population was 11.56 percent (Key Facts | California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.). 2020 to 2021 annual student count for California Community Colleges was 1,976,814. The Asian student population from this data was 299,485

students or 15.14 percent of the total student population (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office - Data Mart, n.d.). There was an increase in the Asian student population at the CCC of 3.58 percent from 2017 to 2020.

California Community Colleges provide a pathway to four-year universities with almost 51 percent of graduates from the California State University system and 29 percent of the University of California system transferred from a California Community College (Facts and Figures - Foundation for California Community College, n.d.). According to data from Data Mart, a database from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, the total number of transfer students for all ethnic groups in two years for the academic year 2013 to 2014 was 3,688. The total number of Asian and Pacific Islander transfer students from that population was 765 or 20.74 percent (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office - Transfer by Ethnicity 2013 - 2014 - Data Mart, n.d.). The data cannot be disaggregated to identify how many were Southeast Asian, which could not be disaggregated further to identify subethnic groups. The total number of transfer students from a California Community College to a California State University for the academic year 2014 to 2015 was 57,770. The total transfer of Asian and Pacific Islander students from that population was 9,023 or 15.62 percent (Community College Transfers By Ethnic Group, n.d.).

The growing Asian-Pacific American student population continues to attend community colleges as a pathway toward degree attainment. The community college system remains an affordable option for many APA students who can earn college transfer credits for transfer to a four-year institution and gain new skills through certificate programs to prepare for a career.

Community college is a primary point of entry to higher education for many Southeast Asian Pacific Islander (SEAPI) students (F. Ngo & Sablan, 2019; Park & Assalone, 2019; Souza

Xiong, 2021). Recent studies have found that SEA students were more likely to attend less to apply and attend less selective colleges due to various factors such as: benefits for their families due to subtler transition between high school and college; cost and affordability; family and relationships; desire to be close to home; and life challenges (F. Ngo & Sablan, 2019). In California, SEAPI students are more likely to be represented in the community college system (F. Ngo & Sablan, 2019). As many SEAPI students matriculate to community colleges, student success varies among the subethnic groups. Among the issues SEAPI students face, developmental education is a natural concern as about 60 percent of students entering community colleges are assigned to developmental math or English course upon enrollment (F. Ngo & Sablan, 2019). Taking remedial courses adds to the total cost of tuition on top of prolonged tenure at the community college. This may ultimately result in a loss of motivation, reduce the likelihood of persistence, and divert students away from credit-bearing courses that will lead to completion or transfer (F. Ngo & Sablan, 2019). Community college remains an affordable option that allows SEAPI students to attend college at a fraction of the cost of four-year universities and the option to remain close to the family to provide financial and familial assistance as needed. Many SEAPI students remain close to their communities and continue to be a part of the family traditions that carried over as they immigrated to the United States. As there are many community colleges throughout California, there is a good chance a local community college can provide many of the course requirements necessary for graduation or transfer.

The pathway from a community college continues to lower many of the costs of attending college. Cost is by far the most frequently listed reason for attending a community college prior to transferring. A SEAPI in a recent study knew that cost was the major factor impacting her

decision to attend community college. “I knew that my parents weren’t going to afford to go to a four-year university, so I decided why waste the money or why apply. I didn’t apply to any schools. I knew I was going to go straight there” (as cited in Park & Assalone, 2019). These are common reasons as to why many SEAPI students do not go straight to a four-year university. Another researcher found that in Texas, over half of SEAPI students received federal Pell Grants or other types of financial assistance and that the majority of the students also had jobs or lived with their parents to save on living expenses (Park & Assalone, 2019). Although community college remains popular among SEAPI students, not every parent was supportive of their decision to attend community college. This was sometimes a challenge for students as many parents set grand expectations for their children and when they first attend community college, they may feel like a failure. Many parents view community colleges as less prestigious than four-year universities. Park and Assalone (2019) found that in their study of students in Texas, 19 of the 28, all of which were first-generation college students agreed that lack of family support and knowledge about college was a major obstacle in their postgraduate planning (Park & Assalone, 2019). Many parents of first-generation college students are not aware of the tuition costs of four-year institutions. The cost savings in attending a community college for the first two years could save the students and parents thousands of dollars. The parents are not also aware that you can earn the same type of credits for lower division courses at the community college prior to transfer. The decision to first attend a community college may sound less prestigious, but as many students face financial challenges, it is an easy decision to make as many want to save as much as possible on their higher education and will remain a popular choice for many SEAPI students and many other students for many years to come. The value you get in return for quality education is high and will continue to be.

Academic Support

The transition from secondary school to post-secondary education is challenging for some. The rigor of post-secondary education proves challenging for those who enter unprepared. Many colleges require students to maintain a specific GPA to remain in good standing. For students who struggle, there are many academic support programs available to them. Academic support continues to provide vital services to students in higher education and comes in many forms. In a previous study, participants identified professors, advisors, academic support programs, classmates, and family as sources of support (Xiong & Lam, 2013). Community college academic counselors assist students with academic planning, transfer services, general education requirements, academic petitions, readmission petitions, and so on. Previous studies indicated that “academic advising is associated with college student’s success and that humanized, proactive, and holistic academic advising can contribute to institutions’ effectiveness in fostering success among minority students.” (Anonymous, 2011) Researchers also found that characteristics of academic advisors play a vital role in the success of retention and graduation rates of students of color. As mentioned by Museus & Ravello (2021), students of color who found academic advisors effective were those who exhibit characteristics that contributed to their success. Academic advisors who advised using a humanized approach, holistic advising, and proactive academic advising were most effective in the efforts to improve success rates among students of color (Museus & Ravello, 2021). By incorporating a human element in their advising, academic advisors are seen as human beings and not just staff or faculty members of the institution. By also using a holistic approach, academic advisors are aware that students’ problems are rarely isolated and support students for non-academic matters as well. Also,

through proactive academic advising, students can connect with various on-campus resources that aid in their success at the institution (Museus & Ravello, 2021).

In another study, the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) aided many students with resources available on campus, learning about college life, managing stress, and managing the school workload (Xiong & Lam, 2013). Although academic counseling continues to aid many students in higher education, many students do not utilize this service. Underutilization of counseling services may contribute to the drop-out rates of Southeast Asian American and Pacific Islander students. Underutilization of academic counselors may also explain why Hmong American college students seek guidance on career goals, research opportunities, and graduate school information from professors instead of through the various campus academic support programs (Xiong & Lam, 2013). SEAPI students may refuse to seek counseling due to many reasons, but counselors that are untrained in culturally sensitive therapy models, a dearth of bilingual counselors, few counselors with similar ethnic/racial backgrounds, and a lack of cultural sensitivity may lead SEAPI students to be misunderstood (Kearney et al., 2005). To increase the number of SEAPI students who seek and receive counseling would be something to explore to ultimately increase the number of SEAPI students who complete their degree programs.

Counseling higher education students have successfully aided many students in their completion of certification or degrees. Working with a well-known community college counselor, I was able to see the success of many former students plastered on the “Wall of Fame” with their picture. Some have returned to community college to start their careers while others are into various professions. Regardless of the successful outcomes, there are still many that do not make it. “Retaining students is an ongoing problem that colleges and universities face.

Twenty percent of 1st-year, undergraduate students do not complete their second semester of college, and 40% of all college students do not earn a college degree” (Bishop, 2016, pg. 205).

Low retention rates can be attributed to assorted reasons ranging from psychological to emotional that affect their ability to cope with continuing their education. Other causes are family obligations, balancing work and school schedules, disinterest in the subject, do not believe a degree will contribute towards the advancement of their careers, and will not provide the training for career opportunities.

The use of student support programs on campus are essential to a student’s success. Hmong American students use of these programs varies across the different services. In a study conducted by Soua Xiong (2021) using descriptive statistics and a one-way ANOVA analysis, he found that 75.2% of Hmong American students engaged in advising/counseling (Xiong, 2021). This is quite high when compared to other Southeast Asian ethnic groups such as Cambodian and Vietnamese American students. This indicates that the majority are seeking academic counseling to ensure they are taking courses applicable to their academic goals.

Student support programs were designed to assist students and ensure success in their academic goals. With a variety of support services available, awareness of these programs would aid students in need of assistance. In the previous study conducted by Xiong, he also found that 60.75% of Hmong American students used tutoring services, but were less likely to engage with career (41.7%) and transfer (54.2%) services (Soua Xiong, 2021). Uy, et. Al., (2019) discussed the college and career readiness among full-time Southeast Asian American college students in a 4-year public university in New England. Our study consisted of surveys (n = 58) and focus groups (n = 35), of second-generation (born in the United States) or 1.5-generation (immigrated as a youth) college students (Uy et al., 2019). While our participants were strong academically,

they still struggled to navigate college, and many did not feel prepared for careers. The study found some variability by majors in the correlation of academic major and career preparedness, and our findings also suggest that Southeast Asian American students shared several concerns, such as lack of finances, inconsistent academic advising, and the need for more career preparation. Nevertheless, across this heterogeneity, students agreed that peer mentors and effective faculty mentors are invaluable resources and that more such mentors and programs are needed (Uy et al., 2019). Student support programs remain vital to the success of Hmong American students in higher education along with the various connections they establish on their campuses across America. The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) remains a vital service to ethnic groups students in higher education. They have allowed ethnic groups of students to become aware of college life and the campus. Through these exploration opportunities, ethnic students can connect with others from similar backgrounds and establish cultural clubs on campuses (Xiong & Lam, 2013). In addition to student support programs, faculty also play a vital role in assisting Hmong American students in higher education. In a previous study, findings suggest that it is important for faculty to express interest in SEAA students' educational success and understand their primary objective to aid them to obtain their goal (Vang, 2018). Connections with faculty give SEAA students the confidence they may need to get through their journey in higher education and believe in themselves. It helps to clear any doubts you may have and allow you to flourish when you feel hopeless. These connections may foster support at universities where there are not many SEAPI students allowing you to thrive when you begin to feel connected to others of similar backgrounds and feel at home at your college campus. Institutions of higher education must be aware of the commonalities shared by SEAPI students and consider the degree to which these factors impact their graduation rates (Creighton, 2007).

Cultural Connection

Success in postsecondary education of Southeast Asian American students was through the opportunity to establish cultural connections at their campus. Campus climate continues to support or be a detrimental effect on the mental health of Asian American students (Cress & Ikeda, 2003). Many newly arrived college students from Southeast Asia or the Pacific Islanders face cultural adjustments when they attend college in the United States and may leave college prematurely due to cultural distance between their cultures of origin (Creighton, 2007). Many Southeast Asian American students are first-generation students. First-generation students often are limited in cultural capital, which can impede their success in college (Shumaker & Wood, 2016). Due to this, many First Generation College Student (FGCS) (Shumaker & Wood, 2016) “tend to become isolated while experiencing frustrations with the educational system, creating difficulties with transitioning from high school into postsecondary education (pg. 10). A school of thought that arrives from facilitating student success is that of institutional responsibility and their role in alleviating pressures that are within their control (Shumaker & Wood, 2016).

Many FGCS transitioning to higher educational institutions impact their mental health due to campus climate. To combat the negative effects on their mental health when the perceptions of Asian Americans on campus climate are negative, students look for others from similar backgrounds to establish connections. Many have connected through ethnic student clubs. Ethnic student organizations fostered the success of Southeast Asian American students by providing them with a space of cultural familiarity, vehicles of cultural expression, and advocacy (Museus et al., 2016). Emergent themes from the study found three types of critical cultural community: physical cultural connections, epistemological cultural connections, and transformational cultural connections (Museus et al., 2016). Physical Cultural Connections

occurred when students were able to connect with individuals and groups of the same or similar cultural communities on campus (e.g., ethnic studies, cultural centers, and ethnic student organizations) (Museus et al., 2016). Students from this study allowed others of similar ethnic backgrounds to find a reason to remain on campus and establish connections that otherwise they would normally just come to school and leave after they are finished with their classes.

Epistemological Cultural Connections are the ways in which the campus enables students to acquire and share knowledge about their cultural communities through various outlets such as ethnic studies programs, relevant culture courses, and cultural co-curricular activities (Museus et al., 2016). Through these spaces, Southeast Asian American students are allowed to share with others about their cultures and find similarities between them. Transformational Cultural Connections are when college campuses provide opportunities to give back to and transform their cultural communities through activities such as community activism, service-learning opportunities, and the involvement in problem-based research (Museus et al., 2016). In another study (Anonymous, 2011) the influence on ethnic groups college students were profoundly impacted by their peers when they were able to find supportive environments on campus and positively associated with success. Other evidence also suggest that peers can also facilitate student success by serving as role models (as cited in Anonymous, 2011). When students observe their peers succeed, they too believe they can succeed. This is a great method for students who may experience doubt and “imposter syndrome.” By seeing others like you make it through higher education and earn their degree, those who follow begin to believe this journey is possible after all. Those before you pave the path forward allowing you to believe in yourself and push forward towards your academic goals.

Cultural support comes in many forms. For some, it is through the resources available on college campuses. For others, it is through their families. The support ethnic groups students receive from their families are what drives and motivates them to earn their college degree and beyond. In one study (Xiong & Lam, 2013) participants' support came from their families in the form of emotional support, motivation to finish to repay or give back to their parents and to serve as a role model for the younger siblings. Hmong American students in higher education also found success through developing cultural connections with their classmates and friends who share similar cultural backgrounds and provided emotional and academic support during challenging times and motivated one another to excel in their work; engaging in extracurricular and scholarly activities to learn and grow (Xiong & Lam, 2013).

As first-generation students learn the importance of a higher education degree, many see this as an opportunity for a better life for themselves and their children. In a previous research conducted on social capital and embedded in the institutional community of an African American institution facilitated the retention and persistence of African American males who entered the institution unprepared and successfully persisted to graduation (Palmer & Maramba, 2015). With a high success rate of persistence through cultural support programs, providing a space for ethnic people of color to connect and network will aid in retention efforts.

Social Capital

The role of social capital in education and society continues to have a profound effect on students in higher education. Information remains a vital and valuable resource that many cannot afford or have access to. Social capital is based on the “social composition of the environment, the individual’s cognitive ability in the environment, the individual’s family background, and the guidance of the individual’s advisors or teachers” (Le, 2018). Low-income

and racial minority students access college at lower rates than their more-advantaged peers, partly due to a lower social capital value (Fitzpatrick, 2020). Researchers looked at the role of social capital as facilitators of college access and success. Social capital is the “value derived from positive connections between people” (November 19 & Business, n.d.). It is the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Museus & Mueller, 2018). It is the relationships established over time that provide you with the information and tools to facilitate the achievement and goals for desirable outcomes (Palmer & Maramba, 2015). It is essentially a membership in a group or network. Social capital has been defined by many authors since its inception over the years. Using a recent definition of social capital by Nan Lin, social capital may be defined as:

Operationally as resources embedded in social networks and accessed and used by actors for actions. Thus, the concept has two important components: (1) it represents resources embedded in social relations rather than individuals, and (2) access and use of such resources reside with actors (as cited in Durlaf & Fafchamps, 2005).

Resource-rich networks have diverse members who have access to resources, expertise, and connections; in such networks, members have access to larger amount of useful information that often enhances the ability of individuals to improve their knowledge and long-term status (Fitzpatrick, 2020). With access to larger networks, those with membership are viewed as having a larger stockpile of social capital compared to those with smaller networks (Palmer & Maramba, 2015). Social capital in education has afforded those with larger networks to vital information and preparation such as standardized testing services to career opportunities. In addition, social capital can provide students with access to various funds of information, serving

as bridges between others in the social network, connecting them with educational programs and opportunities, advocating for them, serving as a role model or mentor, provide emotional and moral support, and providing valuable advice and guidance (Museus & Mueller, 2018). Without intervention from counselors to compensate the transition from high school to college functions as a nearly Darwinian application of social capital, in which academically capable low-Socio Economic Status students are filtered out of college and life-long benefits of a college education due to low social capital (Fitzpatrick, 2020). Access to such information and network provides students with opportunities they would not otherwise know or have access to. Through networking, students can connect with resources that guide them through a complex education and social system that may ultimately receive more in return. Membership in such networks can allow students to go further than they imagined through the numerous opportunities that can only be afforded to those who are able to connect with others who already are members of such networks.

For students to build social capital, they must feel a connection with those with access to large networks. For example, Southeast Asian American and Pacific Islander students can connect with those who shared common ground. In a previous study, many participants described how key institutional agents who helped them to cultivate social capital in college were those who shared racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and increased trust and closure (Museus & Mueller, 2018). The participants felt they were able to better connect with those who have gone through similar situations to understand their struggles. Faculty who have undergone similar experiences can bond and share their experiences to guide their students toward a successful academic and career outcome. They can be mentors and provide moral support for those who are still on their journey in higher education. This type of support may be enough to

keep SEAPI students motivated and push through the difficult challenges ahead. Social capital will continue to be a driver of success. Those fortunate enough to have social capital will continue to succeed in college and life at a higher and quicker rate than those whose social capital worth is less.

Conclusion

College remains an important milestone for many Southeast Asian American families. Many are first-generation college students whose parents fled the instabilities in their homeland in hopes of finding a better place to raise their children and reach their full potential. Many Southeast Asian Pacific Islander (SEAPI) college students have been ignored and overlooked due to the myth that all Asians succeed academically. As researchers begin to unravel the data and take a deeper look at the data, they will begin to see that not all Asians are successful academically. The model minority myth will slowly unfold and reveal that not all Asians attend prestigious higher education institutions. This research hopes to explore strategies on how to help SEAPI students, particularly Hmong American students in higher education succeed. Through the Self-Determination Theory theoretical framework, we hope to identify strategies that aid Hmong American students in competence, connection, and autonomy. Self-determination will remain a vital part of the journey towards higher education degree attainment as Hmong American college students seek the three basic needs of self-determination. Starting in high school, Hmong American college students can earn college credits while also earning high school credits. The opportunity to start college early and experience college life while in high school can have a tremendous impact on the success and persistence of Hmong American students. College preparedness in high school would eliminate some of the challenges faced in postsecondary education and ease the transition from secondary to postsecondary institutions.

This would eliminate the remedial courses taken in postsecondary education and allow students to take transferable college courses. Using student support services would also contribute greatly towards the successful completion of their college degrees. Through various academic success programs such as Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP) and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) can aid Hmong American students to successfully transition straight into a four-year university. For those who attend secondary schools with college and career readiness programs such as Advanced Placement courses, AVID, Dual Enrollment or Concurrent Enrollment, EAOP, and many others out there, are highly likely to enroll and succeed in post-secondary education (Zeiser, 2013). These opportunities can increase the social capital value of Hmong Americans as they connect and network with advisors and mentors. Coupled with cultural centers and clubs, Hmong American college students can feel a sense of belonging on campus.

Many students from previous studies highlight the importance of family as an impact and influence on their successes in postsecondary institutions. Some were first-generation college students while others had siblings to provide guidance. Some had friends in high school that continued into postsecondary that helped them through college. Some rely on themselves and the support services available at their institutions. Others had extended family members to guide and support them through their journey. Most importantly, parental support and influence shaped many of the challenges and successes in college and will continue to impact many SEAPI students in their journeys. For many SEAPI students, community college was the easier transition for the student and their parents as it allowed them time to start college locally while living at home and being able to provide for and aid their parents at home. Parents slowly adjusted to their children attending college and were still able to provide help when needed due

to the proximity of the college. This also helped the student to transition to independency as many were not ready to leave home yet.

The journey leading to post-secondary education has an impact on the success rates of SEAPI students. As researchers, educators, and policymakers begin to look at the disaggregated data, they will begin to see that many sub-ethnic groups do not make it through college. Intervention will be necessary to provide the tools they need to successfully acclimate to higher education and complete their degrees. Intervention through academic support services on campus will serve to be a vital service that will instill the confidence and knowledge to move forward in their journey towards completion of their degree program and beyond. Academic counseling will remain a vital service that will continue to guide SEAPI students to ensure they are taking transferrable courses that apply to their degree requirements.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction to Chapter

The central issue that this dissertation explored is the challenges faced by Hmong American students in higher education. The primary purpose of this study is to identify strategies students utilized to successfully graduate from a four-year university after transferring from a community college. We also explored motivating factors students used to continue pushing them through each semester until they graduate. The driving questions of this inquiry are as follows:

1. What would the Hmong American postsecondary student credit towards the successful graduation from a four-year university?
2. What were the experiences of Hmong American postsecondary students working with student support services?
3. What intrinsic attributes do Hmong American postsecondary students believe assisted in their college success?

As we dig deeper into the issues surrounding student success, we investigated the support services that provided the foundation to motivate and push students toward academic success.

Recognizing the growing and distinct needs of Hmong American students; colleges and universities began developing programs targeting improving retention and academic success. Many have proven successful, such as Extended Opportunities Program (EOP) with a 62.7 percent graduation rate from First-Time Freshmen admitted through regular admission and graduated within six years in the Fall of 2012. The numbers are even higher for community college transfers with an 84 percent graduation rate within six years. These numbers show that this program is working as designed. With an increase in funding, more ethnic minorities or students from low-income households can benefit greatly from these programs and increase the

likelihood of graduating within six years. When you look at the California State University (CSU) system, underrepresented minorities at the California State University system graduation rates increased by 14.1 percent from 2005 to 2013 and 12.2 percent for First-Generation College Students (FGCS) in the same years. The trend is moving upward, and this is most likely to stay unless funding is cut or decreased. If so, it would have detrimental effects on students who rely heavily on the financial and academic support needed to stay on top of their education and work toward graduation.

With ethnic groups graduating at a much lower rate when compared to their White counterparts, equitable systemic policies would greatly help improve graduation rates of ethnic minorities and help to bridge the gap between those with degree attainment and those without. As more colleges and universities develop programs in support of these issues, many still fall through the cracks. For example, Educational Opportunity Programs at the California State University system “designs, administers and supports programs that deliver access and retention services to historically low income and educationally disadvantaged students” whose mission is to be the “primary vehicle for the CSU to increase access, academic excellence, and retention of California’s historically underserved students (low-income, First-Generation College).” (California State University, 2020)

EOP has limited seats and only accepted 6,668 total students across all 23 campuses for the 2018-2019 academic year. The total enrollment across all four levels from Freshman to Senior for Fall 2019 was 430,166 with 303,512 enrollees from an ethnic minority population or almost 63% of total enrollment. Total enrollment for Fall 2018 was 481,210.

Approach

The methodology used is a basic qualitative research study on Hmong American students who have utilized student support services from the community college in which they attended that have led to their successful transfer and completion of their undergraduate degree. The researcher also looked at the student support programs at the four-year university that aided in the successful completion of their degree. The research captured the unique stories of participants and how each student succeeded through transferring from a community college to degree completion at a four-year university. The study also included those who have used student support services and found the student support services to be useful in their pursuit of degree attainment. Their unique stories remain an important piece of the reality many students face and will be used to aid counselors and/or student support services in providing services that fit the needs of their students. These implications will be valuable information for academic advisors and administrators to ensure support is targeted in areas where students need the most help.

Methodology

The research approach for this dissertation is basic qualitative research. A key characteristic of all qualitative research is that individuals construct their reality in the way they interact with their social world. “Qualitative research is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Meaning is constructed and does not inhere in the object, waiting for someone to come upon it. Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage in the world and how they are interpreting it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Through the lens of the participants, meaning is drawn through their personal and academic

challenges as they engage in their experiences in higher education. These experiences shape their thinking and influence their learning. Analysis of the data from the interviews identified recurring patterns or themes supported by the data. The overall interpretation was through my understanding of the participant's understanding of their academic journey and success (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The main goal of this study was to understand and describe the unique stories of Hmong American students and uncover their understanding of those experiences and interpret them. Through interpretation of their stories, I captured the meaning and constructed themes that emerged from the study. The interpretative research approach allowed meaning to be constructed and interpreted throughout the process of collecting data and engaging with Hmong American students after their degree completion (Savage et al., 2018). As suggested by Savage et. al (2018), "Meaning is not uncovered but constructed as individuals interact within this social world" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This study used a basic qualitative research design to examine Hmong American students' perceptions while attending a community college and transferring to a four-year university.

In the basic qualitative research paradigm, the research team collects, codes, and categorizes qualitative data using the constant comparative method from grounded theory methodology. The researchers first use open coding, followed by categorization using axial coding to identify themes in the data (as cited in (Preston et al., 2020).

Basic qualitative design was selected for this study to uncover the unique experiences of Hmong American students in higher education and document their journeys that lead to their successful outcomes. "Research that is focused on the discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making a difference in

people's lives" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The narratives of Hmong American students will aim to provide vital information that will benefit not only Hmong American students but also other ethnic minorities in their quest to complete a degree program at a community college and transfer to a four-year university and earn their bachelor's degree.

Methods

The methods by which data was collected were through a basic qualitative research study; the participant's reflection of their lived experiences in as much detail as possible resulted in the successful completion of their degree program. The unique stories of each participant allowed me the opportunity to identify commonalities among them along with identifying tools and student support programs that fostered their success. Through the exploration of the narratives of ethnic minorities, the documentation of stories collected will be vital in developing long-term solutions to fit the ever-changing landscape of higher education, especially in community colleges across the nation. Through basic qualitative research, the participants had the opportunity to reflect upon moments in their lives that resulted in the successful outcome that occurred.

Description of Participants

The participants for this study included five Hmong students who attended a community college and received support from student support services on campus and transferred to a four-year university. They have also earned their bachelor's degree or higher. These student support services include Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOP&S), UMOJA, Puente, Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) program, CalWORKs, and others. There was no age limit for the participants, but they must be Hmong. There was also no limitation or boundaries to community colleges in California, but anywhere throughout the

United States as community colleges are the most common higher education institution that serves many student populations from low socioeconomic status households and ethnic minorities. Due to the low cost of attendance and low admission requirements, many ethnic minority students from impoverished neighborhoods find these to be attractive options that will allow them to obtain a great education at an extremely low cost when compared to four-year universities. On top of the low tuition rates, many community colleges offer career training programs that can provide the training they need to enter a career in a high-demand industry with livable wages in only a brief period. This is especially important to working-class families and students who cannot afford to spend a long time in higher education and need to continue earning while learning. As the cost of living continues to rise, the need to work while attending school is becoming increasingly common. This is especially true for students who come from low socioeconomic households and need to earn a living to survive. They are challenged even further because they must work while concurrently attending college. Many can't afford the luxuries of focusing solely on education and this may often be the cause of the high drop-out rates in higher education systems. Juggling between work and school forces many students to learn to balance the two. Like juggling, if you don't focus, you will end up dropping all the items you're tossing. Without the practice of time management and work/life balance, some students will fail and give up. Some may return, while others leave higher education for good in hopes of working just to survive.

Data Collection

The method used to collect the data was through audio-recorded interviews in one session of a one-hour meeting. The study conducted in-depth interviews with the participants through semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A). Interviews were the chosen method to

allow for follow-up questions and gain more details about the participant's experiences. The interviews provided rich details on the journey of the students in the community college system and how to navigate through the complex systems of higher education and the requirements necessary to finish your degree program. The narratives of the participants explored the challenges and successes that helped them to overcome and finish their programs to earn an associate's and/or transferred to earn their bachelor's degree. After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed for further review. This helped to capture codes and later developed as themes that were used as ideas and motivation for others to utilize and incorporate in their journey towards degree completion. After the transcription of the audio recordings was completed, the participants received the opportunity to make any corrections or clarifications, and the transcription was shared with the participants. This allowed participants to clarify any misunderstandings or confusion to ensure the message shared was how it was intended to be received. The accuracy of their messages will be important to truly capture the lived experiences of the participants to allow for planning as an academic counselor to identify areas that lack adequate or proper support for future students.

Data Analysis

After the completion of the audio transcriptions of the interviews, the data was reviewed and coded to identify themes using reflexive thematic analysis through a critical or realist approach. A theme is "most commonly understood to be an element that occurs frequently in a text or describes a unique experience" (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, pg. 89, 2006) The themes that emerged were the experience of focus to extract what proved to be successful in the student's graduation from a four-year university. The themes that emerged provided a sense of what the student did to overcome the challenges encountered during their studies. The uniqueness of each

of their stories provided strategies they incorporated into their journey toward the successful completion of their degree program.

By following the thematic analysis approach from the University of Auckland (2020) (Braun & Clarke, 2019), the six-phase process for doing the analysis are as follows:

1. Familiarization with the data: involves reviewing the data multiple times to be familiar with the data
2. Coding: generating labels (codes) to identify critical features of data that may be relevant to answering research questions
3. Generating initial themes: examining the labels (codes) and collected data to identify important larger potential themes
4. Reviewing themes: reviewing the themes from each candidate against the overall dataset to tell a convincing story of the data that answers the research questions
5. Defining and naming themes: develop a thorough analysis of each theme to determine the story
6. Write up: weaving together the analytical narrative and extracting data contextualizing the analysis in relation to the existing literature

The thematic analysis provided many opportunities to immerse myself in the data to identify emerging themes. This took three cycles with the initial read to capture themes relevant to the first question of my research. The second cycle captured themes that are relevant to my second question and the third and final cycle captured themes that answer the third research question. Once the initial themes were documented, I began the process of coding them using MAXQDA; a coding software. This will be important as the themes I seek will be answered based on what I capture from the interviews. After coding, I generated initial themes that identified significant

broader potential themes. Once this phase was completed, I reviewed the themes to ensure they captured the story of each participant that ultimately answered the research question. The next phase was to name and define these themes. Through a detailed and thorough analysis of each theme, they also maintained the story of each participant. This ensured the stories of each participant remained as raw and natural as the story was told. I don't want to take away from what was shared as the data captured intimate details of the participant's journey through higher education. These memories may be hard to share as the participants are reminded of a time of struggle as they worked their way to degree attainment. Reflecting upon my journey, I can identify many struggles that have resulted in making me stronger and more determined to finish and succeed. The last and final phase of the thematic analysis was to weave together the analytical narrative and extract data in relation to existing literature. As their stories unfold, what literature is present that was similar to the experiences of the participants.

Trustworthiness

The data collected were through the coding of the themes that surfaced because of the inquiry into the phenomenon of their success or failure as an ethnic minority in community college. The trustworthiness of this research included triangulation to ensure the results can be repeated. When establishing trustworthiness, one of the most important aspects of congruence is the ability to authenticate the findings with the participants through member checks. (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006) Member-checking techniques allow participants the opportunity to react to the findings and interpretations that emerged from the study. This also allowed for more data regarding specific examples and provide an in-depth analysis of these themes that emerged as a result of the study. Through this technique, I completed the full circle of authentication with

participants providing an opportunity for added input and/or clarification of what I interpreted from the themes that emerged.

The steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness and quality of the data are as follows (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019):

1. Transcribe the audio recordings
2. Read through the text data
3. Divide the text into segments of information
4. Label the segments of information with codes
5. Reduce redundancy of codes
6. Collapse codes into themes

Limitations

The results of this dissertation informed me of what were the primary factors credited towards the successful transfer and completion of their undergraduate degree through student support programs or not and what was used to motivate and push the participants towards degree completion. However, the results from this dissertation reflect the experiences of only a handful or more participants that cannot be used to generalize for the whole population. In addition, not all of the participants have participated in a student support program that resulted in aiding the successful completion of their degree program. Given that the participants are not all from California, the student support programs varied across community colleges and four-year universities. Although many Hmong American students benefit greatly from student support services, many have gone on to successfully earn their undergraduate degrees without the help of student support programs. Another limitation of this study is we do not have a comparison group, prohibiting the juxtaposition between the two groups. Although the experiences of

Hmong American postsecondary students may be similar to other students of color, they are unique to each individual and not representative as a whole for Hmong American students. Lastly, the participants of this study only include Hmong American students who have attended a community college and transferred to a four-year university. Although it would have been valuable to include other Southeast Asian Pacific Islander (SEAPI) groups, this research would run the risk of treating them as a monolithic group. This study does not limit the participants to the number of years attended at a community college or a four-year institution but focused on those who have attended a community college and ultimately transferred to a four-year university and earned their bachelor's degree. Some of the participants also have earned their graduate degrees and beyond. The participant's occupation is also not important or included in the study. Although this information would be valuable, it will not be included in this study.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the methodology and methods employed in this dissertation. The basic qualitative research study captured common themes among the participants and coded to focus on themes that answer the research questions. The response from the participant interviews provided the rich details needed to capture common themes that emerge. The chapter also includes a description of the participants and why they were selected. The criteria for participants were that they attended a community college and transferred to a four-year institution where they were awarded their bachelor's degree. The data analysis method used was reflexive thematic analysis through the six-phase process of analyzing the data. The trustworthiness of the data followed the six steps defined in the book *The dissertation journey: a practical and comprehensive guide to planning, writing, and defending your dissertation* by Carol

Roberts and Laura Hyatt. The chapter also includes the limitations of the study and concludes with the chapter summary.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

Hmong Americans first immigrated to the United States more than forty years ago as refugees of the Secret War in Laos. As immigrants in the United States, starting in a new country and learning a new language have created many obstacles for Hmong Americans to advance careers and education. Starting from scratch with no income or wealth, many Hmong Americans continue to struggle professionally and academically. With first-generation Hmong Americans, we have the opportunity to learn the language and culture of America from birth. Although our familial obligations and ties remain unchanged, with many children required to assist in earning a living and contributing towards the family expenses along with cultural obligations.


The purpose of this study explored the journeys of Hmong Americans in their educational journey in higher education and the successful completion of their bachelor's degree. The start of their journey was at a community college before transferring or continuing at a four-year university. The participants resided in different states: California, Minnesota, and Washington with an age range from their twenties to their forties. The journey of all participants differs in many ways with many attending private and public universities. The stories of the participants unravel the successful strategies many used to finish their degrees and begin working in their current occupations.

The data was collected from semi-structured interviews that were recorded and transcribed from Zoom. The transcription was reviewed by me and corrected for any errors or misspellings. The transcribed data was uploaded to qualitative data analysis software for coding and thematic analysis.

Thematic Analysis (TA) was the method used to analyze the qualitative data from my research. The purpose of TA is to identify “themes” across the dataset to address the research questions. The patterns are generated through a rigorous process of data familiarization, data coding, and theme development and revision (Thematic Analysis | A Reflexive Approach, n.d.). It organizes and describes the data set in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Participant Profiles

There was a total of five participants who participated in this semi-structured online interview. The interviews were scheduled for one hour, but many were completed between 30 minutes to 45 minutes. All participants met my criteria of attending a community college and transferring to a four-year university where they earned a bachelor’s degree or beyond. All participants are Hmong Americans with an age range between 20 to 50. All participants currently reside in three of the most populous states with Hmong – Minnesota, California, and Washington State. All participants have earned a bachelor’s degree with one participant who earned their master’s degree. Table 2 shows the demographic breakdown of each participant with a brief description of each participant following Table 2.

Table 2*Participant Demographics*


Participants

PROFILE

PSEUDONYM	SELF-IDENTIFY	GENDER	STATE	DEGREE
Tehama	FGCS	M	CA	Masters
Chippewa	FGCS	M	MN	Bachelors
Mahnomen	FGCS	F	MN	Bachelors
Snohomish	FGCS	F	WA	Bachelors
Yakima	FGCS	M	WA	Bachelors

TEHAMA

TEHAMA is a first-generation college graduate with a graduate degree in Engineering. TEHAMA first attended the local community college in Central California before transferring to a private university where TEHAMA earned a master's degree in the same field as their undergraduate. TEHAMA currently works in the field of study.

CHIPPEWA

CHIPPEWA is a first-generation college graduate from Minnesota. Their journey in higher education started in California before moving to Minnesota to finish their bachelor's

degree in computer science. Their journey is unique in that they attended community college in different states where the requirements are different. CHIPPEWA eventually transferred to a four-year university and earned their bachelor's degree. CHIPPEWA currently works in the industry in which they majored.

MAHNOMEN

MAHNOMEN is a first-generation college graduate from Minnesota whose journey in higher education started at the local community college. MAHNOMEN is a non-traditional student that took a long break from college before restarting their academic journey. A recent college graduate, MAHNOMEN hopes to give back to their community through services and information provided that will help the community meet their educational needs.

SNOHOMISH

SNOHOMISH is a first-generation college graduate and the eldest of her family. Like many first-generation Hmong Americans, being the eldest required family obligations that they could not excuse themselves from. With many cultural events, they were required to take time off from work and school to help with family duties. Their commitment to themselves and family helped to motivate them to finish college and earn their college degree to make a better living for themselves and their family. Their hard work paid off when they finished their degree and were able to begin working in their field shortly thereafter.

YAKIMA

YAKIMA is a first-generation college graduate from Washington. YAKIMA first attended a local community college before completing their bachelor's degree at another community college that was a satellite campus for a local public four-year university. Like many college students, they changed majors multiple times before settling on a major, but YAKIMA

lost time and money due to pursuing a different major. This cost them additional time at the community college before completing their bachelor's degree.

Coding and Analysis

The first step in the analysis of the interview transcripts started with coding. The development of codes from the interview transcripts through the assignment of a word or phrase to segments of the text allowed for easy organization of the data and easily identify areas that are relevant to the research questions. The coding method used was In Vivo and descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2016). Though there are many coding methods, these two methods allowed the use of words directly from the interview transcripts and are common for qualitative research studies. This allowed for the voices of the participants to be used verbatim and not taken away from their unique experiences in higher education.

Limitations

The limitation of this study is the limited number of participants for this research study. The research on Hmong Americans in higher education continues to grow as the population continues to grow in the United States. As the data on Asian Americans start to disaggregate, we will begin to see where the gaps in degree attainment are within the Asian ethnic group. With the disaggregation of data, this will allow education systems to target specific student populations and provide them with the knowledge and information necessary to successfully apply to college to earn their degree and beyond. With limited data on Hmong Americans, it is difficult to identify the direct causes of attrition. As the data becomes unraveled, we will begin to see and identify areas that need the most support. With every new generation, we hope this information will provide the guidance needed for many Hmong Americans to successfully earn their bachelor's degree and beyond.

Findings

The findings of this chapter were formed through the analysis and coding of data from interview transcript data from one-on-one interviews with the participants of this study. The data provided insight into what Hmong American students from varying states did to transfer from a community college to a four-year university where they earned their bachelor's degree. The journey for each participant was different in many ways, but a few similarities begin to emerge as the data unraveled. With many of the participants coming from non-traditional student backgrounds, they were determined to earn their degree with hopes for a brighter future financially and for personal growth. For the traditional student participants, their journey was full of discovery as they were first-generation college students and first-generation Americans. The exposure and opportunities from college provided them with experience, knowledge, and networking that allowed them to successfully graduate with their bachelor's degree but also aided them in connection with their current career pathways. Counseling proved to be extremely helpful for some participants while others did not need the assistance as they knew how to navigate through the higher education system or did not find the counseling as helpful. Many participants saw the value of connecting with their professors as many helped network them to their current career pathways. The connection with the professors provided the proper guidance and advice on how to land a job in their current career.

The colleagues many of the participants met ended up becoming lifelong friends. The motivation and support from one another pushed the participants towards completion. Although some were secretly competing with one another, the goal was to finish and earn their bachelor's degree to begin working in the field. This support system allowed others to connect with similarities in their personal lives and current struggles. The relationships they built helped to

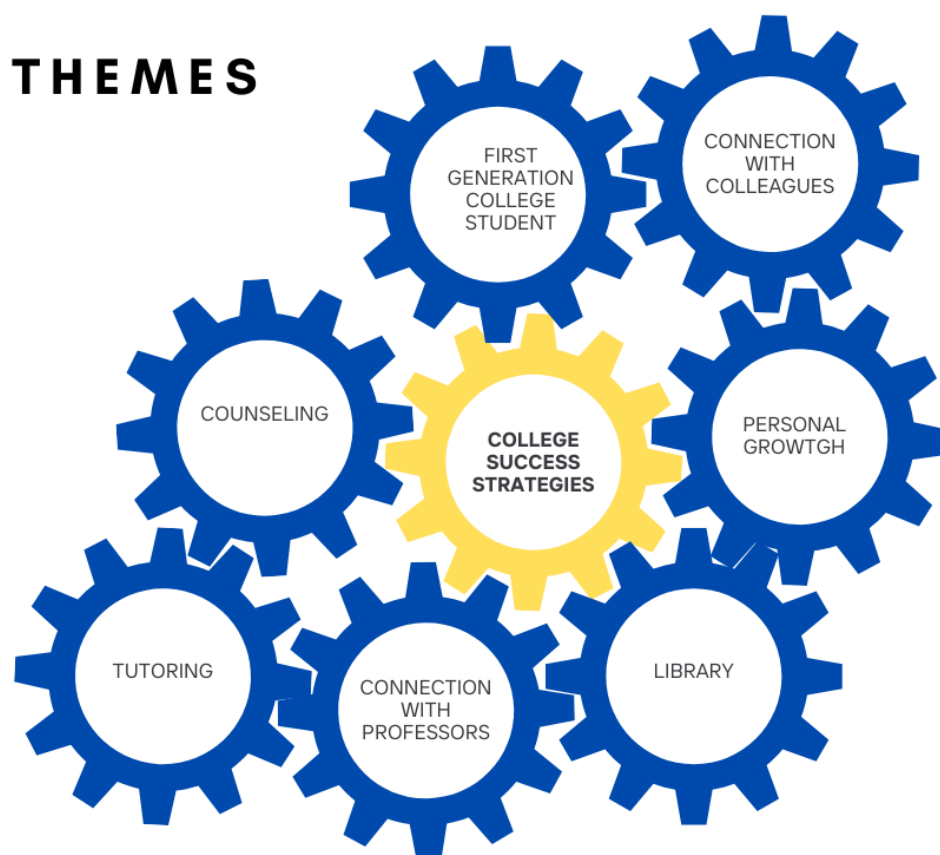
motivate one another to achieve a first for many of the participants. The first to graduate from college in their family to being the eldest in their family.

Another valuable resource that helped many of the participants to finish and earn their college degrees was the library. It provided a space for studying or completing assignments and projects while also providing a computer and reliable internet for use and research databases for completing research projects.

The journey of the participants ranged in majors, careers, experience, age, and colleges attended. As I learn more about each of them and their journey in higher education, similarities begin to take shape and form themes for this study. As I begin to dive into the interview data, salient themes began to emerge. With diverse experiences from Hmong American students in different states, a commonality among all participants indicated the shared experiences of each individual.

Themes

The results from the data analysis identified seven emerging themes: 1) First-Generation College Student; 2) Counseling; 3) Connection with Professors 4) Connection with colleagues; 5) Library; 6) Tutoring; 7) Personal growth. Some themes have subthemes to expand on the support that aided in the participant's academic journey. The following sections will discuss the themes found in the interview data.

Table 3*Themes*

First-Generation College Student

All five participants are first-generation college students. As children of refugee parents, their parents did not earn a college degree. With many parents assimilating to the United States, many found it challenging to understand due to language barriers and lack of access to resources. Due to the language barrier and limitations of their parents, many participants learned how to navigate college on their own. Learning and understanding college was new to all the participants. Many participants struggled to understand the entry requirements for their careers of interest. As they entered college, all participants changed majors from their initial plan. As

they learned how to navigate college, many sought help from the resources available on campus. Student support resources were vital for many of their successes.

As a first-generation college student, many Hmong American students relied heavily on self-motivation and self-support due to the lack of support from their parents. The majority of the Hmong refugees could not afford the opportunity to go to school, let alone college. Many Hmong refugees primary purpose was to provide for their family financially and physically through the only job or skill they have, agriculture or farming. Due to the high labor demands and time consumption from these jobs, many Hmong refugees did not have time to attend school. Many Hmong refugees also do not know where to go for help enrolling in school. The result of this led to many Hmong American students being first-generation college students with no proper guidance from their parents. Many first-generation students navigated secondary and postsecondary school on their own. For SNOHOMISH, her parents did not go to college. She was the eldest and the first in her family to go to college and graduate.

Counseling

Academic counseling is a great resource for students in higher education. Through proper guidance, students have successfully earned their college degrees. From the interview data, many participants identified academic counseling as a major support resource that guided them successfully from the community college to the four-year university. Many were extremely grateful for the guidance and credited the numerous counseling meetings that help them identify pathways to earn their associate's degree and prepare them for transfer to the four-year university.

SNOHOMISH

SNOHOMISH greatly benefitted from her time meeting with the academic counselor. The counselor shared many advice and guidance through the many meetings they had that

successfully guided her to earn her associate's degree and accepted into her program of study at the four-year university. The program was competitive, and she credits the countless hours of assistance from tutors and her professors that helped her earn high grades to qualify her for the program with the program admitting only 30 students a year. The competitiveness of the program pushed students to earn high grades to be a competitive applicant in the program.

I just had a really good experience with her, and I just never thought I would with a Community College counselor. But she did that. She supported me like that in every single way. And I was just very thankful that I met with her. I thought it was kind of like fate that I met with her because if I never went to meet with the academic counselor, I don't think that I would have gone to get my bachelor's because I didn't even know what the path to get there (Interview – SNOHOMISH, Pos. 45-46)

Counseling helped SNOHOMISH to navigate through higher education by providing a road map to earning an associate's degree and transferring to a four-year university. The guidance from an academic counselor was vital in the success of SNOHOMISH as she earned an associate degree and transferred to a four-year university where she earned her bachelor's degree.

YAKIMA

His experience was with two different counselors. The first was for freshmen or brand-new students at the college. The second counselor was housed in a specific major or interest area. The advice he received helped put him on the path of his major and goal of transferring. Participant YAKIMA started with a different major and career goal in mind before settling on his major. With the change midway through his academic journey, he had to start from the beginning by taking many pre-requisite courses to get into the required courses for his degree program. The courses needed for his major were highly rigorous that required countless study times to successfully pass each course. A major with many advanced mathematics and physics courses, he struggled. The counselor provided a lot of the guidance and help needed.

My engineering counselor finally just kind of went with me through the prerequisites on how to get my AS and then afterward what schools are available based on my GPA and what opportunities I would need along with, you know, internships (Interview YAKIMA, Pos. 29)

My engineering counselor actually provide like a pathway for me, different routes, and urged me to take what she'd recommended that would help me throughout my whole Community College or AS degree. And then from there. I was able to, you know, provide me with internships and. Yeah, just a lot of encouragement. And then just give me information on what I need to do it. (Interview – YAKIMA, Pos. 39)

The advice he received helped prepare him to meet the degree requirements at the community college and transfer requirements to the university and the program. The student also received information on internships and was able to obtain an internship from the referral and advice from the engineering counselor.

My engineering counselor. She was able to like, give me support or give me a pathway and where I'm going to go in my education and then also gave me an opportunity to really get an internship (Interview – YAKIMA, Pos. 100)

CHIPPEWA

As CHIPPEWA attended community college, he did not seek academic counseling. It wasn't until he transferred to a four-year university that he sought guidance. At one of his meetings, the academic counselor advised him to lower the number of courses he was taking in the current semester due to the work and time required to successfully pass each course.

So midway through the second semester that I came back, the counselor noticed I was having a rough time with some of my grades, so she advised me that, you know, maybe I should think about dropping one because I was taking about 18 credits at that time and working a full-time job. So, she was like, she probably think about dropping one of those classes to help balance your work-life balance and, you know, get your grades up a little bit more so. And that's what we did. We dropped one of those classes and I saw improvements in the other classes and a little better work-life balance and student learning as well (Interview – CHIPPEWA, Pos. 129)

It is important to take the right courses for your major, but just as important to successfully pass each course and learn the material. After receiving the advice of dropping a course, CHIPPEWA

saw improvements in his coursework and improved his work, life, and school balance. Juggling with work, school, and life can lead to many stressful days and nights. By creating an equilibrium with competing priorities, CHIPPEWA saw the importance and value of balancing priorities. The success with a well-balanced school, work, and life plan proved to be a powerful factor in the success of CHIPPEWA in his undergraduate studies and mental health. Mental health problems are very common among college students. By creating a work-life balance, studies have shown that a work-life balance is an antecedent of college students' mental health (Sprung & Rogers, 2021).

Academic advisors or academic counselors supported CHIPPEWA and answered all his questions during his time at the college. The advisor made him feel welcomed and supported and helped CHIPPEWA to envision the larger picture and goal in life to broaden his mind and the possibilities of careers with the major and degree. The advice received by the student influenced his decision which resulted in his successful completion of the degree.

MAHNOMEN

Participant MAHNOMEN met with an academic counselor a couple of times during her time at the community college. The academic counselors provided her with a roadmap to getting her degree when to apply for her degree, and the transfer pathways to a four-year university for her bachelor's degree. The academic counselors were welcoming and provided a little bit of support during her time at the community college. The academic counselors also advised her on the recommended courses to take as she transitioned back to college after a break, so she doesn't feel overwhelmed with the transition from working back to college full-time. This helped her have a balanced school-life balance and smoothed the transition back to college after a long break from school.

Connection with professors

Professors played a vital role in guiding the participants through their program with many who have direct experience working in the field of study and knowledge of the entry requirements to the careers of interest of the participants. With a connection with the professors, the participants were able to network and receive career advice and guidance. Many participants increased their social network through these established connections.

SNOHOMISH

Connecting with professors is a great way to network and gain advice from real-world experienced professionals with experience and knowledge on how to break into the industry. The depth of experience and knowledge allows students to get free advice along with possibly connecting with employers for a job after graduation or during school. For SNOHOMISH, the connection with her professors provided her with a direct connection to industry professionals and guidance.

By connecting with my professors, it just kind of opened up my eyes, and like, having them have been in the field already. I think that it connected me as well as having their experiences. And then like, relating it to the especially like the schoolwork that we're doing. While taking the program, it really helped a lot having that one-on-one experience with them and it made me feel like having a close relationship with them. (Interview – SNOHOMISH, Pos. 84)

YAKIMA

Professors not only provide you with real-world experiences and knowledge but also a resource for you such as writing a letter of recommendation. For YAKIMA, he saw the value of connecting with your professors and building professional relationships with them. Before transferring to a four-year university and into a program, students sometimes need a letter of recommendation or two. For YAKIMA, his connection with his professors was important as they were willing to write him letters of recommendation for a competitive STEM program.

These types of connections create opportunities for students to gain personal insight into the industry and career from first-hand experienced professionals. The connection with the faculty members also helped SNOHOMISH to get into the engineering program after receiving letters of recommendation. It was his hard work in the classroom and the connections he established while in the classroom that helped him pass his classes and also be recognized and recommended to a competitive degree program.

Building a relationship with your professor or you know, even connections with the professor, professors, and counselors really help and come along with getting to the university that you want to go get into as well (Interview – YAKIMA, Pos. 106)

MAHNOMEN

MAHNOMEN returned to school after some time off. She became a peer tutor for one of her courses. Her professor saw her strong understanding of the subject and thought she would be a great peer tutor for the class. Having direct experience working in the real world in the field, she was able to grasp the subject much faster and much clearer. Because of this experience, the topics covered in the course were areas in which she has many years of experience working in the real world. These experiences helped her to learn the material of the class and tutor her peers or other students taking the course.

The faculty members were also very supportive of her. MAHNOMEN saw the value she brought to the classroom. She was recommended to be the first to present a final project to the class. The professor saw the quality of her work and dedication to the course that she would do well in opening for the project presentations. After successfully passing the class, she was asked to be a tutor for the course. This motivated her to finish college after receiving recognition for her hard work and dedication to the course.

Connection with colleagues

Creating a connection with our colleagues is an important part of attending higher education. Many participants from the study have formed lifelong relationships with many of their colleagues, with many in constant communication with their peers. Many participants understand the value of connecting with others to develop a network that they may need in the future. These relationships allow participants to connect and seek advice or guidance or check in with each other. Building your social capital in higher education is important. As many Hmong Americans in higher education realize, it is important to develop friendships that may be a resource later such as referral for jobs, resource sharing, or lifetime friendships. Connecting with colleagues is also a great way to work together on academic projects and as study partners for assignments, tests, and quizzes or share notes and knowledge. For many of the participants, connection with colleagues helped motivate and pushed them to finish their degree programs. Everyone has their strengths and skills and shares similar struggles in college. Having friends in class can help you by discussing the notes from the lecture, helping you understand the lecture, or working together on assignments and projects.

SNOHOMISH

You never know who you'll meet or what similarities you share in common with other people until you start talking to them. When you connect with others, you begin to identify similarities and develop relationships with others. The similarities range from ethnic backgrounds to residence to parenthood to first-generation college students. For SNOHOMISH, her connection with a colleague started because they were both pregnant while going to school. They leaned on each other and motivated each other to finish because they saw the importance of having a college degree and what it can mean for them professionally and financially.

I was pregnant with my daughter, so it was nice that there was another pregnant student in my class. So, it motivated me because we both were moms, and we were pregnant. And I felt like it helped that we both share those things. Our experience of like going to school and like having other roles. So, we both identified in that (Interview – SNOHOMISH, Pos. 146)

YAKIMA

By connecting with his peers, YAKIMA saw the benefits of meeting and connecting with his colleagues. By working together, you increase your chances of successfully passing the class by studying together and sharing knowledge. He saw that his friends in the class have similar struggles as he did so he did not feel alone in his struggles in the classes he took.

The only way to really pull through is actually building a relationship with your colleagues and then going from there. There are answers that some may know and some may not know just because they're a little bit more knowledgeable or you know some don't think you know a lot of the students you meet there they all think differently so, working collaboratively together. You know you're kind of able to help. You're able to help each other identify problems, and issues and solve problems within the homework or assigned assignments that the teachers give you so definitely creating meaningful relationships in the university is definitely helpful (Interview – YAKIMA, Pos. 72)

TEHAMA

Some of the friends you make in college end up being lifelong friends. You continue to build on the relationships you created while in college and share resources and knowledge. You also use each other as motivators to finish college. You pull from their successes and create your success by using their motivations as your motivation as well or you secretly compete with your peers to push you to work harder.

I had like a project classmate we still keep in touch with. We advise each other on goals or life goals, and we try to help each other to become better than where we're currently at. So, in a sense it gives you something to achieve or compare (Interview – TEHAMA, Pos. 85)

Once a person gets a better grade than you, you have like an internal competition to be better, right? And then it pushes you to achieve your goals because when you see what some other graduates are ahead of you, then you're like, oh man, I want to be like that

person. I want to actually graduate too. So, in a way, it supports you by knowing or well, by having similar culture or ethnic connections with the students (Interview – TEHAMA, Pos. 141-143)

By connecting with his colleagues, TEHAMA found motivation from his time with his peers and used that motivation to finish college and earn his degree. This is an important strategy that students can use to continuously better themselves through the motivation of others and the determination to do well in school and in life.

Library

For many Hmong Americans in higher education, the library continues to be a resource. All five of the participants expressed their appreciation for the library. According to a recent research study, 74.5% of the 605 participants used the campus library with 74.8% of the 262 Hmong students used the campus library (Soua Xiong, 2021). The library provided the participants with a space to complete assignments or conduct research for projects. The library also provided access to costly research databases and access to a computer. This was helpful when the participants forgot to bring their laptop to school or needed one with access to research resources that can only be accessed through the school computer.

SNOHOMISH

The library is a welcoming and inviting space for all students. It provided a quiet space for students to read, work on assignments and projects, and computers. It allowed students to focus on their studies and connect with peers. The library also had separate spaces for small groups to meet and study. For many students, these spaces helped them in their studies due to the lack of space and quiet at home.

Being able to have like a space that's quiet cause you know not all of us, all, not all of us have that at home. It really helped because just helps us focus and especially if you're studying with your peers. It really helped to have that common space to do that and then utilizing the library, because sometimes, you know, like not the Public Library has stuff

that's like pertaining to what you're doing in class that having those resources and helped me personally (Interview – SNOHOMISH, Pos. 154)

The technology available in most libraries allows students to conduct research. The access to paid databases for research projects allowed students to access the necessary documents and information for their projects. Access to paid software was also necessary for some projects as the cost of many software necessary for projects is out of the budget for many students.

Having even just a technology because I know that sometimes we have certain software that we're learning. Systems that you know we don't have, like at the regular library at home, so just utilizing the computers at schools, it helped too (Interview – SNOHOMISH, Pos. 154)

Access to the campus library and the computers allowed students to succeed as it provided many of the resources needed to complete projects and a space for many students to focus on their studies.

YAKIMA

Access to paid research databases and software was necessary for many students. For YAKIMA, it was required as many of his projects required information from these databases. The library also had computers to work on assignments and projects.

The computers allow you to look up information that you need in order to do your studies and stuff like that (Interview – YAKIMA, Pos. 134)

CHIPPEWA

The library played a vital role in completing a major project for his degree. Accessing paid research databases was needed for his research project. The computers on campus allowed access to many more research databases that cannot otherwise be accessed at home or outside of the college campus. Access to some of the equipment, software, and research databases can only

be accessed on campus and sometimes only in the laboratory. Sometimes, access to the course materials for the class was only accessible on the college campus.

The library did play a crucial role during Capstone, so I had to use that quite a bit because a lot of the information that we did was on their campus lab. Libraries slash computer equipment. some of the materials were on campus, though, so I had to go on campus and use the library for it (Interview – CHIPPEWA, Pos. 174)

MAHNOMEN

Access to private space and quiet space helped MAHNOMEN to focus on her studies. Having the space to read, write, and study allowed MAHNOMEN to get the most out of her studies. With dedicated time and space to focus, she was better able to grasp the course subjects and apply the knowledge directly to her completed assignments and projects. This helped her to shine through in her assignments and projects. Her professors recognized the quality of her work, and this created new opportunities for her.

I used the library to study like physically just study, but mostly I, use the online library to access the online databases. (Interview – MAHNOMEN, Pos. 210)

The library also provided a valuable resource for students in the form of free Wi-Fi and a Wi-Fi router that can be taken off campus for use. Access to reliable internet was also vital to her success. Her college library offered Wi-Fi hotspots that she can check out to allow her access to the internet from anywhere. This allowed her to access the internet in cafes and the park, which she would frequent when she needed a different space to work on her assignments and projects. Having access to Wi-Fi hotspots eased her mind and stress as she was able to access the internet anytime she wanted to outside of the college campus. Being in a different space and time allows you to draw from different energies and find inspiration and motivation to continue your studies.

The library was very helpful because it's a quiet space. You know there are some common areas that we could also study, but it, you know, can at times be very loud. So, it was a quiet study space with reliable Internet. And you know, they have things like sometimes I needed like a calculator that I could check out and they had Wi-Fi hotspots too, that I

could, that I could check out as well, where, you know, if I needed to go to café or park or something, I could use it. So that's, that was what was nice and there was, we also had some common computers that were set out, like in the common areas as well as the library. So, if, you know, I didn't have my laptop with me, I could just log into any of those computers and you know, do some work as well. (Interview – MAHNOMEN, Pos. 216)

Having computers available for student use was also helpful for MAHNOMEN, especially during times when she forgot to bring her laptop. With many computers available for use throughout the library and common areas of the library, MAHNOMEN was able to access a computer any time she needed to. This is a lifesaver for busy parents who often juggle between school and children who often run back and forth between the two and forget to bring their laptop to school.

TEHAMA

The library provided ample space for small to large-sized groups on some college campuses. The library at TEHAMA's college campus had meeting rooms large enough for small and medium-sized groups. These spaces allowed TEHAMA to form study groups to meet and study collaboratively. These spaces allowed them to focus on their studies while being able to access their peers for questions and discussions to better understand the course subject and assignment. Being an immediately available resource helped during times of high stress when preparing for a test or exam and completing complex assignments.

The library had a meeting room that we use a lot to study and focus because you're still on school grounds. Instead of studying it at a different location where you're not in school really kind of distracts you. (Interview – TEHAMA, Pos. 155)

Not only was access to large spaces important for TEHAMA but also access to computers and equipment on campus. Having access to these spaces and computer equipment allowed him to be more successful in his academic journey.

Tutoring

For many of the participants, tutoring was a big help in getting them through rigorous or difficult courses. The availability of free tutoring made it an attractive draw for the students as they can receive help free of charge through the college's tutoring programs. The free tutoring available to students is often ignored when students are struggling in the course. Tutoring is a great way to get the one-on-one attention you need to help you better understand a subject to develop the foundational knowledge and beyond of the subject. According to the research study by Xiong (2021), more than half of the 605 participants utilized tutoring (55%) in a community college with 60.7% of the Hmong participants (262) used tutoring while in community college (Soua Xiong, 2021). Tutoring helps you to learn from a peer or expert in the subject to help reinforce your understanding or help you understand the material in a way that makes sense to you. Many times, a tutor is a former or current student who recently took the course and successfully passed the class with a high grade. They are often familiar with the course subject and the professor. This can be helpful in many ways and can help you to understand the expectations of the course, but most importantly learning and understanding the material. With many complex subjects, students can easily fall behind if they don't grasp the subject early on and can end up struggling the rest of the semester. Tutors can help alleviate the stress and lack of understanding of the course subject and teach it to you in a way that you will better understand. Due to the one-on-one attention with a tutor, you can ask many questions that you may not otherwise get the opportunity to do during class or meeting with the professor either briefly after class or during office hours.

SNOHOMISH

Tutoring was extremely helpful for SNOHOMISH during her time in higher education. She utilized the free resource offered through her college and university to get the help she needed to successfully earn high grades in some of her courses. She created a plan each week to meet with tutors to help her better understand the course subjects and is committed to seeing them each week. This helped reinforce her knowledge of the course subjects, especially in courses where she struggled. She viewed tutoring as a commitment to herself helping her to learn the course subjects to better prepare her for her future career. The free tutoring services she received helped improve her in many ways from personal growth to professional growth.

Personal Growth

What you get out of school is what you put into it. All the participants saw some form of personal growth. From the course subjects to making friends with colleagues and faculty to networking with peers and faculty helped each participant grow. With many opportunities to grow personally in college, many participants improved their understanding and knowledge of the course subjects and used that to help them to grow professionally as well. Personal growth for each participant varies with the majority viewing the most value was their professional growth.

YAKIMA

Personal growth allows you to experience something you never knew until you go through it personally. As YAKIMA progressed through his degree program, he saw his personal growth through his new experiences in college. A great benefit to his personal growth was the improvement of his writing skills. The courses pushed him to improve his writing skills as many of his assignments and projects required well-written research and analysis of his findings.

As I progressed through the, you know, my education and then graduating, I realized that, you know, there are things that you don't realize you don't know until you kind of go through it (Interview – YAKIMA, Pos. 80)

Going through a degree (program) forces you to build on your communication skills, your writing skills (Interview – YAKIMA, Pos. 80)

Getting your degree is very important because it allows you to and forces you to grow personally in terms of your personal traits (Interview – YAKIMA, Pos. 80)

All of my writing classes helped with developing my personal development (Interview – YAKIMA, Pos. 114)

Throughout my writing courses and you know additional writing courses that were part of the prerequisites, were a good experience to have and help build my personal development (Interview – YAKIMA, Pos. 114)

MAHNOMEN

College was not just about earning a degree, but the personal and professional growth that is a part of it. The opportunities are endless as you learn and explore what the college has to offer. For many non-traditional college students, college was a way to advance personally and professionally. For MAHNOMEN, it was to open more professional opportunities. Having many years of experience and knowledge, her career opportunities became limited due to the lack of a college degree. Knowing this, MAHNOMEN made the sacrifice of resigning from a full-time job to focus on her education. Having returned to college after many years was a tough transition, but an opportunity she embraced.

I felt like the reason why I left my job, my management position, that I had for about 6 years was because I felt like I couldn't grow within the company. I loved what I was doing, but there was no room for growth, or personal growth, so I decided to just go back to school. I didn't have a degree and I felt like that was going to open a lot more doors for me. And immediately like I felt the effects of, you know, leaving that position and then going to school full time and then just, you know, a lot of doors did open for me during that time. (Interview – MAHNOMEN, Pos. 133)

The projects and assignments from class provide an opportunity for students to work with their peers and to learn how to research and complete projects by their deadlines. It also forces you to change your perspective and into a role that may differ from what you're used to. For MAHNOMEN, it allowed her to see from a new angle.

Working on group projects in general, I feel like really. It really showed me. It really like made me have to like either pull back with my (role). Because I was in so many leadership (positions), in a leadership position for so long that I had to kind of pull back and let others, kind of take the lead sometimes, so that was humbling for me to just, kind of step back and allow others to lead from their personal perspective. And then there are other times where I felt like I needed to step in and kind of pull away in order to get the projects done too (Interview – MAHNOMEN, Pos. 162)

College was a great opportunity for MAHNOMEN to finish her degree and create more new opportunities for her to advance personally and professionally. Equipped with a college degree and new experiences and knowledge, she is ready to tackle new challenges personally and professionally as she transitioned into a vital role that will help her the way others have helped her.

TEHAMA

College was a great experience for TEHAMA as he gained personally and professionally from his studies. The assigned projects helped him connect with his peers and establish a strong support system for each other. The direct hands-on experience taught him many valuable skills necessary for his career. The collaboration with his peers helped teach him how to work with others and use his strengths to complete projects.

The hands-on lab experience that improved my personal development with the school curriculum and classmate support structure. (Interview – TEHAMA, Pos. 113)

The opportunity for personal development also came in the form of the establishment of a new club on campus. He saw the need to create a new club with other students who were ethnically and culturally similar. This forced him into a leadership position where he had to research club

requirements and establish the bylaws along with the goal statement for the club. He had to learn how to run a meeting along with tracking the minutes. Funding was also a requirement for the club as it will require funding to operate. Learning to be creative and finding ways to generate revenue for the club was no easy task. Not only was funding a concern for the club but also for membership. Learning how to recruit and increase membership along with identifying to vote on important goals and tasks for the club. The leadership skills he gained from his experience as a founding member of a club for the college taught him the core requirements for creating a club to the management of tasks and projects for the club. Also, he learned the struggles of running a club and the challenges that come with it.

I would say we founded a club when there wasn't one. So, I had to research into the bylaws or the goal statement for the club. So, that was a good experience to have. (Interview – TEHAMA, Pos. 117)

So, the experience I would say like running the meeting, keeping minutes, and setting expectations for events and also, funding events too. Also, asking for support from the members. (Interview – TEHAMA, Pos. 125)

We didn't have a lot of members, but it was challenging to get member support. And at the same time, challenging to meet goals or get funding because since you don't have a lot of money, it's hard to get funded at the same time. But we did a lot of car washes which you know, luckily, that fundraiser helped fund a lot of the projects that we did. (Interview – TEHAMA, Pos. 129)

The experiences in college helped TEHAMA to grow in many ways personally. Using his new experiences and knowledge helped him professionally in his career in a leadership position and personally, he has plans of starting an organization. With his new skills, he is equipped with the knowledge and information needed to start an organization along with strategizing on how to overcome the challenges he may run into.

Summary

This general qualitative research study involves five Hmong Americans throughout the United States of America and identified their strategies for transferring from a community college to a four-year university and earning their bachelor's degree. Seven themes emerged from this study: 1) First-Generation College Student; 2) Counseling; 3) Connection with Professors 4) Connection with colleagues; 5) Library; 6) Tutoring; 7) Personal growth. Through the narratives of the participants, their lived experiences provided insight into the struggles and successes of Hmong Americans in higher education. In the next chapter, the research questions and summary of themes will be discussed.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS & SUMMARY

Introduction

Hmong American students in higher education continue to increase as the Hmong population in the United States continues to grow. With population growth, there will usually be a growth in the total number of Hmong American students in higher education. Although an increase in the number of students attending higher education is a great thing, what will be most important will be the total number of students that graduate with a degree. Like all first-generation citizens, Hmong Americans want to make an impact in the United States. As America has become its home with no country to return to, Hmong Americans are assimilating to their new environment. They have learned that success in America starts with a solid education. This study will provide insight into the experiences of Hmong Americans and their success stories.

Through data collection, I hope this study will influence higher education administrators to set aside funding for the valuable student support services that successfully capture students at risk of dropping out and assisting them towards completion. Student support services have been part of many success stories. Through personal and academic counseling along with tutoring, study skills, workshops, and mentoring, many students have successfully graduated and transferred to a four-year university. A student support program at a local community college has proven to advise students that successfully transferred to a four-year university. The evidence of hundreds of student photos with their major and four-year university splashed all over the walls of the room proves these vital services work. This example can be used for all student support programs to inspire and motivate others to follow.

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences and challenges faced by Hmong Americans in their journey in higher education to reach the goal of degree attainment. Hmong Americans continue to learn the balance between family, school, work, and their personal lives. As they juggle between family obligations, school, work, and their personal lives, many Hmong Americans find it challenging to balance and oftentimes find it easier to just work a full-time job to earn a wage to assist the family with their expenses. This often results in Hmong Americans dropping out of college and focusing their time and energy on their careers to assist their families or support their own families. With many Hmong American students obligated to assist their parents, they often remain close to home and attend the local community college. Another barrier is the cost of tuition and housing that students are required to pay when they attend college away from home. With many Hmong Americans struggling with day-to-day living expenses, the additional cost may be too high for many of them. This can lead to high attrition rates for Hmong Americans in higher education.

Like many Americans, all the participants started at a community college before transferring to a four-year university to earn their bachelor's degree. Many of the participants faced challenges of family and cultural obligations that often require the participation and contributions of each member. As many Hmong Americans balance family and school, many do successfully transfer from a community college and earn their bachelor's degree and beyond. This research study was designed to pull from the experiences of Hmong Americans who have learned to balance family, school, work, and their personal life. The goal and purpose of this study were to help current and future Hmong American students in higher education successfully earn their bachelor's degrees. Like all of my participants, I can relate to many of their struggles and challenges. As a first-generation college student, I experienced first-hand the challenges of

balancing between family, school, work, and personal life. The struggles take a toll on you and push many of us to prioritize one over the other with family, oftentimes being the highest priority while for others, earning a wage to support your family and yourself. These are not unique to Hmong American students, but common among many first-generation college students in the United States.

Increasing the total number of Hmong Americans with a bachelor's degree and beyond will help increase the contributions of Hmong Americans to society while also enriching their lives with livable wages and respectful occupations. With a highly educated Hmong population, I hope to see scholarly contributions towards research and building a better world for everyone in this world. Having an education helps shape the character of our children and allows them to accomplish greater things in life. By earning a bachelor's degree and beyond, we become role models for our children and help them achieve greater and go further academically, professionally, and personally than the limitations that many first-generation Hmong Americans face. Through these strategies, Hmong Americans can accomplish the same as others in higher education and beyond.

The study identified successful strategies used by the participants to finish their bachelor's degree or beyond. The three research questions that guided this study were:

1. What factors successfully aided Hmong American college students to transfer from community college to a four-year university?
2. Were there any college programs or interventions that Hmong students contributed toward the student's success? If so, which college programs?
3. What individual motivations, strengths, skills, or abilities did the Hmong American college students student credit for their success and persistence?

There was a total of five participants selected for this study. The participant's locations ranged from California (CA) to Washington State (WA) to Minnesota (MN). Two participants were

selected from WA and MN, and one from CA. Data was collected from one session of one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each session for up to one hour. From the data collection and analysis, the summary of themes is discussed next.

Summary of Themes

The data collected from the interviews provided great insight into the journeys of the Hmong American college students. The following themes emerged: 1) First-Generation College Student; 2) Counseling; 3) Connection with Professors 4) Connection with colleagues; 5) Library; 6) Tutoring; 7) Personal growth. All participants cited the determination to change their personal and professional trajectory by completing and earning their bachelor's degree. The career and financial opportunities after completing their degree program will help to provide for their families and be a resource for their children. All participants were first-generation college students that will pave the way for their children to be college-ready when they are of age.

Results

The findings from the research study through the lived experiences of Hmong American college students provided insight into the struggles and successes of their time in college. The information gathered will be a resource for future Hmong Americans as they enter college and what resources will aid them in their pursuit of higher education. With many of the participants being non-traditional students, many learned to balance school, work, personal, and family obligations while remaining committed to their goal of earning a bachelor's degree. The research findings provide an understanding of the tools available to them and used them to finish college. The results demonstrate their dedication and commitment to their education.

Research Question 1: What factors successfully aided Hmong American college students to transfer from community college to a four-year university?

Counseling

Academic counseling played a vital role in the succession of transfer from a community college to a four-year university where they earned their bachelor's degree. The guidance many of them received was extremely helpful in routing them in the right direction toward their academic and career goals. Academic counselors are equipped with the knowledge of transfer requirements and prerequisites necessary to get into a degree program. They are also a resource for guidance on career requirements along with career connections. Academic counselors also write letters of recommendation for students as they prepare to transfer to a four-year university, into a degree program, or for a career. They are also aware of resources available to students who may benefit from the services available to them on campus or off campus. Academic advising remains an integral part of Hmong Americans in their academic aspirations.

Connection with Faculty

Faculty is a great resource that can help connect you with companies in the industry for career opportunities or internship opportunities. They are a valuable resource that can provide students with guidance into their careers along with tips on how to apply for a job. Many faculty members come with experience and knowledge in the industry. This can be extremely helpful for students looking for a job right out of college. Faculty can connect with previous employers and connect them with the students along with writing letters of recommendation. This will help students gain access to career opportunities that are not yet published or allow them to be hired immediately after graduation. For many of the participants, faculty aided them in writing letters of recommendation, connecting them with employers, and motivating them. Connecting with

faculty can sometimes be a missed opportunity to get information about career possibilities and opportunities for students. Many of the participants connected with faculty and received proper guidance on career possibilities along with receiving letters of recommendation for academic programs at the four-year university or into the workforce. From personal experience, my connection with faculty members has helped me establish strong relationships with them along with seeking advice and tapping into their wealth of knowledge for assistance with job opportunities.

Connection with Colleagues

Many of the participants found lifelong friendships while in college that they continue to stay in contact with to this day. Other participants connected with colleagues to work collaboratively on assignments and projects. Many of the participants found similarities with those they connected with and help each other through the challenging courses in their degree programs. Some of the participants also leaned on each other as motivation to finish their degree programs and internally compete with their peers on earning high grades and finishing their degree programs. The connection between participants and their peers varied, but they saw the importance of connecting with their peers and the benefits of working together. Many participants also identified through the similarities in their struggles and helped each other through the courses and motivate one another. Connection with your peers allows you to draw on each other's strengths and expertise and help you become a better student along with an understanding of course materials. It also lessens the stress when you collaborate and work through your assignments and projects. These bonding opportunities can be beneficial in the future as many enter the workforce and into their careers. These relationships strengthen over time when you connect with your colleagues.

Library

The library is a valuable resource that was helpful to all of the participants in this research study. By granting access to paid software, research databases, and equipment, the participants were able to access the information they need for their research projects or assignments. Some were even able to borrow Wi-Fi routers for internet access off campus. The library also provided computers for those who do not have one or may need access to one when they forget to bring their laptop or to access software that is only available on the campus computers. The library also provided ample space for students to work individually or in groups. The spaces available allowed students to work independently on their studies in quiet spaces. They also had access to larger areas suitable for small to medium-sized groups for meetings and study groups. Many of the participants utilized the space available to them which allowed them to study and focus on their coursework. This was a vital resource for all participants. Libraries have always provided space and equipment for students to be successful. With access to computers, textbooks, books, enterprise software, and databases; these often-overlooked support services can contribute greatly towards a student's success. Libraries have always provided me with a quiet space and access to any information necessary to get through the classes.

Research Question 2: Were there any college programs or interventions that Hmong students contributed toward the student's success? If so, which college programs?

Tutoring

Tutoring is a great way to get one-on-one help on course subjects. They allow students to access peers who previously took the course and earned a high grade and sometimes have taken the same professor the students are currently taking. It is a free resource available to students that is another missed opportunity for those struggling to understand the course material. As a

free resource, tutoring can help students learn the material at a deeper level through the tutor and allow time for many questions to thoroughly understand the subject matter. For some of the participants, this was extremely helpful because that allowed them to earn high grades in the courses and improve their overall GPA to make them competitive for competitive programs at the four-year university level. One of the participants made it a commitment to see a tutor weekly and used those meetings to learn the course materials. This made her a better student overall and helped her in her studies at the four-year university.

Research Question 3: What individual motivations, strengths, skills, or abilities did the Hmong American college students student credit for their success and persistence?

First-Generation College Student

All the participants in the study were first-generation college students. Without any guidance from their parents, they all had to navigate through the complex systems of higher education and identify careers that will allow them to be financially secure. The lack of guidance from family made it difficult to navigate through college, but they all persevered and successfully earned their bachelor's degrees. Many of the participants received guidance from high school and college that aided them in the succession of degree completion. As first-generation college students, all participants used this as a motivation to finish college and earn their bachelor's degree. By completing their degree, they were able to secure a better future not only for themselves but for their children as well. Being a first-generation college student is very challenging with no guidance from your parents. FGCS have to rely often on outsiders to guide them through their academic journeys. It can feel extremely lonely for many FGCS as they navigate college.

Personal Growth

All the participants experienced some form of personal growth. Through the coursework, many participants gained knowledge about the subject matter and improved their understanding of their major. They also grew professionally as the courses enhanced their understanding of the subject matter and taught them the necessary information that allowed them to gain entry into their current occupations along with the tools they use daily in their current role. All participants wanted to grow personally and used this as a motivation to earn their bachelor's degree. By completing their degree, they will develop personally through the courses and experiences in higher education. By being exposed to various growth opportunities, they were able to benefit academically and professionally as well. This helped them to become better writers and improve their mathematical skills. Also, being persistent in their pursuit of a degree displayed their commitment to themselves and their growth.

Discussion

As Hmong American populations in the United States continue to grow, so will Hmong Americans in higher education. The strategies they use will continue to change as many become aware of the resources available to them to be successful in their pursuit of their bachelor's degree and beyond. The emerging themes from this study reveal what proved to be successful in their pursuit and identify recommendations that were not used or not helpful.

From the findings of this study, the data revealed strategies that successfully aided the participants in their journey toward degree completion. The major findings from this study reveal that faculty and counselors play a vital role in guiding Hmong American students in higher education toward degree completion. They were instrumental in the guided pathways provided to some of the participants that proved valuable information to guide them toward the

completion of their associate's degree but also to make them competitive in the program they pursued. The importance of the data revealed that although some strategies worked for some, others did not benefit from some. The data also revealed that some student support programs that were designed to focus on and target specific populations did not affect Hmong American students. Student support programs such as TRIO, EOPS, and CalWORKs were not beneficial to the participants of this study. Although only one participant was from California and EOPS and CalWORKs are only for students in California, the participant did not benefit from these programs. This could be due to the lack of marketing or awareness of programs available to them. Student support programs can increase awareness of these programs on campus and increase the number of students they serve. Another area that did not have an impact on Hmong Americans in higher education was clubs. Although some participants were part of a club, the majority of the participants did not benefit from this. By joining a club, students can benefit through networking, group study, and sharing resources to help one another through their academic journey. The lack of membership in clubs was not beneficial to the majority of the participants. Club membership continues to be a powerful resource that will benefit many others in the present and future. Clubs also help students to identify other students of similar cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds and can be a resource for students to network and connect to share ideas and strategies along with help each other to graduate and/or transfer. This strategy did not impact the majority of the participants but is a powerful resource that will continue to serve many students.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations will help as a pathway for many current and future Hmong American students in higher

education to finish their academic journey with a bachelor's degree and beyond. As Hmong Americans continue to graduate from college, many will be able to guide their children and others toward degree completion. The barriers that were present in the participant's journey, will hopefully no longer be a barrier for their children and future generations.

As Hmong American population continues to grow, so does the need to provide academic support services and guidance on how to successfully navigate through college and earn your degree and beyond. As data on Asian Americans become disaggregated, the data will reveal the need for these services to increase the degree completion rates of Hmong Americans in higher education. Student support services such as counseling have equipped many Hmong Americans with the information they need to successfully navigate through community college and transfer to a four-year university where they will earn their bachelor's degree and beyond. Academic advising or counseling provided many of my participants with the information they needed to successfully navigate through higher education. Many have expressed gratitude and appreciation for these services that aided them in their academic journey, guided them through college, and help them land careers in their field of study. As first-generation college students, Hmong Americans need student support services to ensure their success.

Through this data, the research reveals that many of the student support services designed for targeted student populations did not benefit the participants of this study. Though many student support services are a great and powerful resource and the direct result for many of the successful students who graduated and transferred, the participants of this study were not aware of all the services available to them on campus. This can be due to the lack of marketing of such services or the participants did not feel they could benefit from these services. It could also be because they did not think they were eligible for these services. Student support services on

campus can increase marketing of such services through emails and displays throughout campus along with making this a requirement in orientation to make students aware of student support services offered on campus and how they can get access to the help they need. With the digitization of information and living in a technology-driven world, access to information has become readily available and can be disseminated quickly and easily to reach students far and wide. As access to technology becomes increasingly affordable and a requirement in today's world, information can now reach students in a matter of seconds through text to their mobile phones along with postings on student apps and school websites. Colleges and universities can also collect data to ensure the information has reached the students along with the relevance and usefulness of the information.

Another recommendation to increase awareness of available student services is through a liaison for ethnic populations at the college in the form of student representatives from clubs and organizations on campus to have an officer in charge of sharing student support services on campus to its members. By having an identified person from each club or organization, they can disseminate the information rapidly to its members and share resources to ensure their timely transfer or timely completion of their degree. This will reach more students from underrepresented student populations and hopefully increase participation in student support services and overall timely completion.

As tuition continues to increase each year, the financial needs of many students increase simultaneously. This is especially challenging for Hmong Americans with many being first-generation college students and continue living at home in order to afford the high cost of attending college while contributing to support the family's expenses. Another recommendation to assist Hmong Americans in higher education is through financial assistance. Financial

assistance can come in the form of federal, state, or local assistance along with scholarships that target Hmong Americans. An increase in the total grants awarded to Hmong Americans will aid them in their academic journey by focusing more on their studies and less on their financial status and the expenses necessary to be successful by lessening the burden many Hmong Americans face. Student debt forgiveness can also aid in the increase of Hmong Americans earning their bachelor's degree and beyond.

Further Research

As the Hmong American population continues to grow, so does the need to identify student support services to guide and support them in their academic journey in higher education. As having a bachelor's degree or beyond becomes increasingly a prerequisite for careers that pay a higher salary, many see the need to earn a degree. Data on Asian Americans portray all Asians as successful in higher education, but many sub-ethnic groups are falling behind. Hmong Americans still lag behind other Asian ethnic groups in degree completion. Only 14 percent of Hmong Americans graduate within six years when entering straight into a four-year university when compared to other Asian ethnic groups (as cited in Vang, 2018). As the data on Asians become disaggregated, we will start to see which sub-ethnic group of Asians needs the most help and target these populations to provide them with the necessary help they need in order to succeed in higher education and beyond. Asian Americans have varied backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses that not everyone has equal education opportunities. With Southeast Asians being one of the newest groups of Asians immigrating to America, they lag in their degree attainment levels when compared to other Asian Americans.

With this study, the data revealed areas that can improve access to information and resources that can aid Hmong American students in higher education. With student support

programs designed to target specific student populations, the majority of the participants did not benefit from these services. The information from student support services may not be reaching the target demographics that could potentially benefit from the services available to students in higher education. Through targeted services, the information can be helpful to Hmong Americans that may be struggling in their classes or personally at home. Student surveys will help capture the data on areas where support is needed for Hmong Americans to be successful in their academic journey.

Summary

This study searched for strategies that aided Hmong Americans in the successful completion of their bachelor's degree. As many Hmong Americans lag behind other Asian Americans in degree attainment, the purpose of this study was to identify successful strategies used by Hmong Americans during their academic journey in higher education. By identifying these strategies, the goal is to increase the number of bachelor's degree graduates in the Hmong population. Through the lived experiences of Hmong Americans in higher education, the research provided insight into the successes and challenges in higher education. The research data identified seven themes from the interview data: 1) First-Generation College Student; 2) Counseling; 3) Connection with Professors 4) Connection with colleagues; 5) Library; 6) Tutoring; 7) Personal growth. The major themes found being a first-generation college student was challenging as they did not have educated parents to guide them in their higher education journey since their parents are all refugees. Academic counseling provided many of the participants with the information necessary to transfer from a community college to a four-year university along with the requirements for your bachelor's degree. Connecting with faculty and colleagues was also another strategy many participants used to pass courses and develop

relationships. Campus resources were also helpful in the success of the participants in their academic journey. Participants of this study all grew personally and professionally. The lived experiences of the participants will be helpful to future Hmong Americans in higher education as they work towards their academic goals. The contributions from the participants will help many Hmong Americans as they enter into their academic journey and face challenges similar to theirs and identify solutions to overcome these barriers. The experiences of Hmong Americans in higher education will continue to evolve along with the challenges and successes they will encounter. The strategies will continue to evolve until a simpler path will allow all those in higher education to become successful in their pursuit of earning a college degree.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Community College Success

A qualitative study on success, motivation, and inspiration for Hmong American Students in higher education. Identifying themes that successfully helped Hmong American students earn their bachelor's degree.

* Required

1. Name

2. Gender

Mark only one oval.

Female

Male

Gender neutral Prefer

not to say Other:

3. Education

Check all that apply.

High School

AA/AS

BA/BS

MA/MS

PhD/EdD/JD/MD

Other: _____

4. What community college did you attend? (I will create a pseudonym in my research)

-
5. How important is it to you to see an academic counselor? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Important

6. Did you see academic counseling at the community college? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

7. Did you feel connected with your academic counselor? (If you did not see an academic counselor, please skip)

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Maybe

8. How often did you meet with an academic counselor during your time at the community college? (Skip if you did not meet with an academic counselor)

Very poor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very good
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Mark only one oval (0 to 10)

9. Rate your experience while attending community college.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very poor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very good

10. Rate your experience while attending your four-year university. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

11. Tell me what you did when you encountered a challenging class/time and what you did to pull through and pass the class. *

12. How important is it to you to create meaningful relationships while attending college/university? * Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very important

13. Tell me about your experience from the answer above. *

14. How important is it to earn your degree for personal growth? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very important

15. Tell me how your degree helped you grow personally. *

16. Please tell me about your experience working with student support programs.

(Leave blank if you did not work w/ any student support programs)

17. How important is it to you to have a connection with your professor? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very important
