LEARNING ABOUT STUDENT SUCCESS: A CASE STUDY
OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT SERVICES
PRACTITIONERS IN CALIFORNIA

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Abstract

The doctoral thesis presents findings of a qualitative instrumental case study that examined how community college student services practitioners learned about issues related to student success. Thirty-five community college employees responsible for implementing the Student Success and Support Program in California completed an online intake form and 11 of these respondents participated in follow-up interviews. Through inductive analysis of documents, interviews, and intake forms, it emerged that practitioners learned about student success through (1) on-the-job experiences, (2) professional development and training activities, (3) and dialogue and problem solving with colleagues. These modes of learning were impacted by external pressures, personal commitment, and inclusion. The study concluded that practitioners preferred relevant, task-focused training, and that the student success legislation provided practitioners with both the impetus and content for learning. Further, employee engagement and inclusion were essential for learning about student success. Suggestions for practice included the expansion of learning opportunities, particularly for classified support staff who felt excluded from professional development activities. Additionally, practitioners were encouraged to seek learning and development outside the region in order to gain a broader view of student success strategies. The researcher recommended future research on community college student services practitioners and provided recommendations for ways that professional associations could contribute to research and practice in community college student services. The study helped to address a gap in the literature by shedding light on learning among community college student services practitioners, a population that has often been neglected in student affairs research.

Keywords: student services, student affairs, practitioners, community colleges, student success, adult learning, staff development, classified staff, California Student Success Act of 2012
Guide to Acronyms and Terms

AACC: American Association of Community Colleges

ACPA: College Student Educators International; continues to use acronym for former name (American College Personnel Association)

CCC: California Community Colleges

Matriculation: The process of preparing students for enrollment in college, including orientation, placement testing, and academic advising

NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education; continues to use acronym for former name (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators)

SSSP: Student Success and Support Program

Student affairs: the broad professional community of practitioners, scholars, and associations in higher education dedicated to supporting research and practice in student programs and services at colleges and universities

Student services: all types of nonacademic, co-curricular student support programs and services on community college campuses

Student services practitioners: employees who develop and execute student support programs

Student success: student retention, graduation, and transfer to baccalaureate institutions
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This doctoral thesis focused on the nature of learning among community college student services practitioners responsible for implementing a student success initiative in California. Chapter 1 introduces the study, first by providing an overview of the context and then describing the research problem. Next, the study's purpose and research questions are presented, followed by an overview of the research design. The significance of the study, assumptions, delimiters, and limitations are then provided. This is followed by a description of the theoretical framework that guided the study. The chapter concludes with definitions of key terms, summary, and description of how the remaining sections of the thesis are organized.

California's Student Success Plan

In 2010, California legislators set into motion an expansive student success initiative aimed at increasing student completion within the California Community Colleges. Alarmed by low graduation and transfer rates, lawmakers directed the CCC to create a statewide Student Success Task Force charged with developing solutions for improvement that would later be adopted by the State Legislature (Taylor, 2014). The resulting Student Success Act of 2012 enacted comprehensive changes to enrollment, orientation, academic guidance, and support services through an initiative known as the Student Success and Support Program (Bahr, Gross, Slay, & Christensen, 2015; California Community Colleges [CCC] Chancellor's Office, 2012).

The college completion problem is not unique to California. On average, only three in 10 students who enter community colleges nationwide, or approximately 30%, earn degrees or credentials (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2011; Fike & Fike, 2008). Consequently, increased attention from nonprofit institutions, the federal government, and state legislators is putting pressure on community colleges to increase degree production (Braxton et
al., 2014; Kuntz, Gildersleeve, & Pasque, 2011; Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2014). As a result, community college employees across the nation are tasked with developing innovative programs that increase student success (Jenkins & Woo, 2014; Kolenovic, Linderman, & Karp, 2013; Ozaki & Hornak, 2014; Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011).

In California Community Colleges (CCC), these programs are coordinated by student services administrators, counseling faculty, and support staff on each campus (Yamagata-Noji, n.d). Thus, the CCC Student Success Task Force (2012) recommended "a continuum of strategic professional development opportunities for all faculty, staff, and administrators" (p. 53), but progress reports indicate that not enough has been done to help CCC employees learn how to improve student success (CCC Student Success Initiative Professional Development Committee, 2013). Thus, more progress on professional development and employee learning is necessary in order for California to meet community college student completion goals (Taylor, 2014).

To that end, this case study examined the experiences of CCC employees in order to understand how and why they learned about student success barriers and strategies. The study provided needed insight for the CCC system and other campuses implementing student success initiatives regarding the learning needs of their student services employees.

**Statement of the Problem**

Although various state and national graduation initiatives aim to increase the number of students earning postsecondary credentials, community colleges have failed to substantially raise completion rates (Baldwin, Bensimon, Dowd, & Kleiman, 2011; Bragg & Durham, 2012; Braxton et al., 2009; Karp, 2011; Melguizo & Kosiewicz, 2013; O'banion, 2010). Many community college students are unprepared to handle the demands of higher education and as a result, experience significant issues outside the classroom that negatively impact their academic
progress (Fike & Fike, 2008; Helfgot, 2005). For example, students at these campuses require remediation, disability support services, enhanced career and academic counseling, and financial assistance at higher levels than their four-year counterparts (Boggs, 2011; Sandeen, 2011; Offenstein & Shulock, 2010).

To address these needs, community colleges must help students understand and navigate the college environment, clarify their career goals, and manage multiple academic and personal priorities (Karp, 2011; Nodine, Jaeger, Venezia, & Bracco, 2012; Scott-Clayton, 2011). With these "non-academic supports" (Karp, 2011, p. 1) so vital to student success, student assistance programs serve as the foundation of retention and completion initiatives (Dalton & Crosby, 2011, 2012; Habley, Bloom, Robbins, & Robbins, 2012; Manning et al., 2014; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). In order to effectively implement such initiatives, community college employees therefore need the ability to develop appropriate interventions for a wide variety of students (Culp, 2005a, Hirt, 2006; Kisker, 2005; Tyrell, 2014b).

However, practitioners responsible for student services at community colleges may be underprepared to develop impactful programs (Culp, 2005b; Kisker, 2005). Research suggests that community college faculty and staff may have less education and training (Dalpes, Baston, & Sanchez, 2015; Kisker, 2005), less support for professional development (Basham & Mathur, 2010; Delport, 2015; Ebbers & Rivera, 2015; Gibson-Harmon, Rodriguez, & Haworth, 2002; Shulock, 2002), and less professional experience (Dalpes et al., 2014; Ousley, 2006; Mattox & Creamer, 1998) than employees at four-year institutions.

This is disconcerting, since a competent and well-trained workforce is vital to the success of student support programs (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Janosik, Carpenter, & Creamer, 2006; Lunceford, 2014; Schreiner et al., 2011). Student services practice requires a diverse set
of skills such as communication, counseling, program development, budget management, staff supervision, and multicultural awareness (Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2005; Cuyjet, Longwell-Grice, & Molina, 2009; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Ozaki & Hornak, 2014; Reynolds, 2011). Researchers have noted that these competencies can be acquired through various means, including graduate-level education, workshops and conferences sponsored by professional associations, problem solving with colleagues, and coaching by supervisors (Cooper, Boice-Pardee, & Miller, 2011; Cooper et al., 2013; Ebbers & Rivera, 2015; Grace-Odeleye, 1998; Tull, 2006).

Indeed, much research has emphasized the importance of education and ongoing learning for student services practitioners (e.g. Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Haley, Jaeger, Hawes, & Johnson, 2015; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Herdlein, 2004; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). However, because most student affairs research and professional development focuses on the experiences of practitioners at four-year institutions, little is known about how community college practitioners develop their skills and what motivates them to participate in ongoing learning (Culp, 2005b; Hirt, 2006; Tyrell, 2014b). Since they are working with increasingly diverse student populations, community college practitioners may actually need a wider breadth of competencies than those at four-year institutions (Burkard et al., 2005; Dalpes et al., 2015; Hirt, 2006; Hirt, Esteban, & McGuire, 2003; Tyrell, 2014b). Thus, existing student affairs research and professional development models may not be applicable in developing learning activities for community college student services personnel.

Yet, the creation of training and development activities requires knowledge of employee learning needs, goals, preferences, and motivations (Knowles, 1978; Noe & Wilk, 1993; Maurer, Weiss, & Barbeite, 2003; Salas, Tannenbaum, Kraiger, & Smith-Jentsch, 2012). As Cooper and
Miller (1998) posit, "the more that is known about how and why student affairs practitioners develop, the more the profession can establish environments that are conducive to that development" (p. 56). Since limited research has addressed community college practitioners, it remains unclear what types of learning activities they need in order to effectively implement student success programs (Garber & Wills, 2015; Ozaki, Hornak, & Lunceford; 2014; Hirt, 2006; Tyrell, 2014b). Without knowledge of practitioner experiences, efforts to improve student success may lack efficacy as the learning needs of employees responsible for coordinating such initiatives go unmet (AACC, 2012; Bensimon, 2007; Ebbers & Rivera, 2015; Ozaki et al., 2014).

**Purpose of the Study**

Given the problems of research and practice described above, this study sought to fill significant scholarship and knowledge gaps related to the experiences of community college student service practitioners. Specifically, the study examined how and why practitioners learned about student success barriers and strategies. As Guskey (2000) asserts, "one constant finding in the research literature is that notable improvements in education almost never take place in the absence of professional development" (p. 4). Therefore, this research aimed to identify practitioner learning experiences, motivations, and needs to uncover how campus leaders and professional associations could strengthen their support for community college employees tasked with implementing student success initiatives.

According to Habley et al. (2015), "the sustainability of the field depends on student affairs professionals intentionally learning and developing their skills to meet the changing contexts of education" (p. 325). Hence, knowledge generated from this study informs community college practice and scholarship by providing recommendations for learning opportunities that can enhance practitioners' abilities to increase student success.


**Research Questions**

The study focused on understanding the learning experiences, motivations, and needs of student services practitioners who were implementing the statewide Student Success and Support Program in California Community Colleges. Two research questions guided the study:

1. How do community college student services practitioners in California learn about issues related to student success?
2. Why do community college student services practitioners in California participate in learning related to student success?

The questions were intentionally broad to allow insights about practitioner learning methods to emerge from the research. To explore these questions, the researcher first sought information about the student success related responsibilities assigned to practitioners. Information was then gathered regarding the learning activities in which these practitioners had participated, as well as the reasons they chose to increase their skills and knowledge related to student success.

**Overview of Research Approach and Design**

The study followed a qualitative approach informed by an interpretive paradigm that focused on understanding the problem of practice from those experiencing it (Pontorotto, 2005, p. 129). In order to gather information directly from student services practitioners, the research design employed an instrumental case study method. Yin (2003) explains that case studies are appropriate when "how or why questions ... about a contemporary set of events" (p. 9) are being investigated, and when the context is "highly pertinent" (p. 13) to the research. The purpose of an instrumental case study is to explore one case in-depth in order to gain insight on the phenomenon in other settings (Grady, 2010; Stake, 1995). Although many colleges across the
nation were implementing completion initiatives, focusing on the issue in one setting, the California Community Colleges, allowed for a holistic exploration of practitioner learning. Thus, this research shed light on the learning experiences of practitioners tasked with increasing student success in the community college setting.

Documents, interviews, and intake forms provided data for the study. Thirty-five practitioners completed a web-based Participant Intake Form that collected information about their demographic backgrounds and experiences with learning related to student success. Follow-up interviews were completed by telephone with 11 of these participants utilizing a semi-structured interview protocol. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed, and then results were compared with data from documents and participant responses from intake forms. Data analysis resulted in the development of nine themes organized under four overarching categories that described how and why practitioners learned about student success. Overall conclusions and implications for research and practice were drawn by reviewing the study's key findings in light of the theoretical framework and existing literature.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by the concept of andragogy, an adult learning model introduced by Knowles (1974, 1980, 1995) and rearticulated by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (1998, 2015). Adult learning theories aim to understand how adults learn, make meaning of their experiences, and apply their learning. Andragogy is one of the earliest and most enduring concepts of learning in adulthood. In fact, Merriam (2001) describes andragogy as one of the "pillars" (p. 3) of adult learning because it provided insight to an emerging field of adult education when few theories or models existed. Although there are multiple models or theories related to adult learning, andragogy may be the best known and widely discussed (Daily &
Andragogy has been applied to many situations where adults learn, including adult basic education, career and vocational training, workplace learning, and online education (Merriam, 2001; Marsick, 2009; Yang, 2003).

Assumptions and Principles of Andragogy

Andragogy maintains six assumptions of adult learners related to their (1) readiness to learn; (2) use of past experiences in new learning; (3) orientation to learning; (4) need to know reason for learning; (5) self-concept as learners; and (6) motivation for learning (Knowles 1990, 1995; Knowles et al., 1998; Merriam, 2001). The key components of andragogy found within Knowles' assumptions and principles are highlighted in Figure 1.

Along with identifying the characteristics of adult learners, Knowles (1974, 1995) describes principles for designing adult learning experiences. He suggests that adult education must be learner-centered, problem-focused, and applicable to real life. Further, Knowles posits that by recognizing the experiences adults bring to the learning environment and helping them see the where new knowledge or skills will be useful, educators can help adults diagnose their own learning needs and goals (Knowles et al., 2015; Merriam & Bierema, 2013).

![Figure 1. Key components of andragogy. Source: Knowles (1995); Knowles et al. (2015)](image-url)
Andragogy Applied to the Doctoral Thesis

Assumptions and principles of andragogy are relevant to student services professional learning in a number of ways. Central to adult learning is the idea that adults are most interested in and receptive to learning when their needs, roles, or expectations change (Knowles et al., 1998). As described, this study's problem of practice highlights that new student success goals require community colleges to strengthen student support services (Karp, 2011). This presents new challenges for student services practitioners, who must increase their capacities to help students persist to graduation. Therefore, learning opportunities must be provided for employees in order to meet these new requirements (Haley et al., 2015; Taylor, 2015). This directly aligns with Knowles' (1974, 1990) assertion that adults develop new needs for learning as their roles, requirements, or situations change.

Andragogy also focuses on the capacity of adult learners to self-diagnose and address their learning needs (Knowles et al., 2015). Involving learners in the development and assessment of learning is a critical component of andragogical design (Rachal, 2002; Knowles et al., 1998, 2015). Following this assumption, the study directly involved student services practitioners in examining their learning experiences. Including practitioners in this research allowed them to describe their own learning needs related to student success and to explain their motivations for continued learning.

Finally, andragogy requires that learning be problem-centered and relevant (Knowles et al., 2015). In applying adult learning theory to higher education professional development, Lawler (1991) asserts that educators have "a pragmatic desire to immediately use or apply knowledge" (p. 12), and this desire propels them to seek resources to solve problems they face in their everyday practice. As such, the problem statement and research questions for this study,
focused on learning about student success, were developed from a contemporary challenge in community college student services practice. Further, the use of a case study method allowed the research to explore the phenomenon of learning in order to implement a new initiative that unfolded in real-time (Yin, 2014).

As demonstrated, andragogical concepts provided a rich framework from which to explore learning among community college student services practitioners. The concepts of andragogy informed the research plan, which is further described in Chapter 3.

**Significance of the Study**

In order to increase retention and graduation rates, community colleges must strengthen their co-curricular student support programs (Karp, 2011; Nodine et al., 2012). This requires the involvement of knowledgeable and well-trained personnel who can help develop, implement, and assess new programs and services (Culp, 2005a; Dalpes et al., 2015; Tyrell, 2015b). Increasing the efficacy of student success and completion programs is significant to several constituents in higher education. Specifically, community colleges, students, and student services practitioners benefit from better knowledge about practitioner learning, as does the greater student affairs professional community.

First, how community college student services practitioners learn about student success strategies is of concern for campus leaders who are tasked with increasing completion rates. Due to budget reductions, retirements, and lower entry-level education requirements for community college student services staff (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Kisker, 2005; Rosa, 2009), leaders in such environments must focus attention on supporting, engaging, training, and developing existing staff in order to increase the quality of their student services programs (AACC, 2012; Ebbers & Rivera, 2015). It is crucial that college leaders enhance their support for staff learning,
since the ongoing development of employee skills is the most important element in organizational effectiveness (Gibson-Harmon et al., 2002; Kegan & Lahey, 2010; Maurer et al., 2003; Nordhaug & Gronhaug, 1994).

As Guskey (2000) states, "at the core of each and every successful educational improvement effort is a thoroughly conceived, well designed, and well supported professional development component" (p. 4). However, effective training programs cannot be designed without knowledge of the learning needs and motivations of practitioners (Cooper & Miller, 1998). Thus, this study set the stage for professional development efforts aimed at community college student services practitioners by providing a glimpse into the learning experiences, needs, and motivations of these employees.

Next, students benefit from the support of well-prepared advisors and staff. Community colleges enroll a student population that is more diverse than that of four-year institutions in terms of race and ethnicity, educational ability, socioeconomic status, and disabilities (Boggs, 2011; Fike & Fike, 2008; Melguizo & Kosiewicz, 2013). The need for quality support services increases as more students gain access to higher education (Lazerson, 2010), but the lack of attention placed on community college practitioners limits advancement of completion initiatives (Culp, 2005a; Bensimon, 2007). Hence, research focused on the learning experiences and needs of student services practitioners has the potential to increase the scope and effectiveness of student success programs. In turn, this could positively impact community college students. Without research expressly involving these practitioners, student needs may go unmet.

Further, as this expanding population of underprepared students enrolls at community colleges, student services practice is becoming increasingly complex (Kuk, 2015; O'banion, 2010). Employees who assist students are faced with an ever-expanding set of professional
requirements stemming from shifting student demographics, expanding enrollments, increased governmental mandates, and decreased funding (Hirt, 2006, 2007; Tyrell, 2014b; Wartell, 2013). In this rapidly changing environment, understanding how to address student issues and continually updating one's skills is vital for student services practitioners (Haley et al., 2015; Lunceford, 2014). Further, literature on personnel development indicates that staff members are most effective when they feel understood, valued, included, and supported (Gibson-Harmon et al., 2002; Marsick, 2009). Therefore, at the practitioner level the study benefits community college student services practitioners whose experiences and needs have been highlighted.

Finally, attention to community college student services practitioner learning is relevant to the field of student affairs. Bradbury, Kilminster, O'Rourke, and Zukes (2015) assert, research about professional learning is a serious concern for those involved in ... continuing professional education and the accreditation and training of professionals. Many of the professions have developed their own spaces -- conferences, journals, symposia, associations -- to consider research about issues such as processes of learning ... (p. 125)

Student affairs professional associations have acknowledged the need to better assist community colleges with the implementation of student completion goals (Commission for Two-Year Colleges, http://www.myacpa.org/commtwoyear; Marcus, 1999), but most professional development activities and research still focus primarily on practitioners at four-year institutions (Ozaki et al., 2014; Tyrell, 2014b). Thus, illuminating the experiences and needs of community college employees helps professional associations gain insight on how to support such practitioners.

Assumptions, Delimiters, and Limitations

Assumptions

The following assumptions guided this study:
1. Student services, and the practitioners who coordinate these programs, have a positive impact on student progress and completion (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009).

2. All practitioners bring a combination of education, experience, and interests into the workplace that informs their understanding of and ability to impact student success (Bensimon, 2007; Knowles, 1995; Roper, 2011).

3. Effective student services practice requires ongoing learning about the issues and challenges that influence student success, since the higher education environment and student populations are constantly changing (Cooper & Miller, 1998; Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Haley et al., 2015; Janosik et al., 2006).

These beliefs served as motivations for the researcher to undertake this study. To decrease the chances that these assumptions influenced the results, various trustworthiness methods were employed, such as member checking and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2012), as described in Chapter 3.

**Delimiters**

While the overarching objective of this research was to gain insight into the experiences of community college student services practitioners, delimiters were developed to help guide and narrow the scope of the study. These delimiters included site, context, participants, and time.

The study took place within the California Community Colleges system, which was in the process of implementing a statewide initiative known as the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP) under the Student Success Act of 2012. All employees involved in the study were participating in SSSP implementation on their respective campuses.

The research was also completed at a particular point in the SSSP implementation
process, which bound the study by time. The 2014-15 academic year marked the first full year of implementation focused on student matriculation and advising components of the legislation. Practitioners were interviewed during the summer of 2015, after experiencing one year of implementation. Therefore, they had time to participate in learning activities and reflect on their learning needs related to increasing student success prior to participating in the study.

Limitations

Although the delimiters provided focus and direction for the study, they also represent possible limitations. Findings and conclusions may not be transferrable to practitioners at other types of institutions, those who have different responsibilities, or those who are at another stage of implementing such initiatives. Also, the focus of the study was on learning about student success, and findings may not reflect how and why practitioners learn about other responsibilities and challenges.

Additionally, since the study utilized volunteers, it is possible that the participants who took the time to complete the intake form and interview may have been highly invested in student success issues or their own professional learning. Thus, their experiences may not have reflected those of practitioners with less interest in increasing their knowledge or improving student completion rates.

Definition of Key Terms

College student affairs and services are programs or offices that provide support for students outside the classroom setting (Porterfield, Roper, & Whitt, 2011). Although programs are organized differently among institutions (Kuh, 2015), such services generally include admissions, financial aid, registration, housing, academic advising, career guidance, clubs and organizations, learning communities, recreation and athletic programs, health services,
discipline, veterans’ programs, disability support services, diversity awareness programs, and multicultural resources (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Sandeen, 2004; McMurray & Sorrells, 2007; Tyrrell, 2014b). The terms student services and student affairs are both used to describe these programs (Blimling, 2001).

The term student services is typically used to describe such programs at community colleges. In the California Community Colleges, the term is generally used as the name of the entire division charged with providing support and assistance outside the classroom. Therefore, student services was utilized throughout the study to encompass all types of nonacademic student support programs and services on community college campuses. Student services practitioners are the employees who develop and execute these programs. In California, student services personnel include managers, classified staff, and counseling faculty.

The term student affairs was used throughout the thesis in reference to the broad professional community of practitioners, scholars, and associations dedicated to supporting and advancing research and practice in higher education related to student services.

Student success, as used in this thesis, described the concept of increased student progress, graduation, and transfer. As Manning et al. (2014) note, student success can be broadly defined as academic achievement, engagement, retention, and goal completion (p.17). However, the term is often used by institutions, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations as an overarching title or name of initiatives aimed at increasing the production of postsecondary credentials (Baldwin et al., 2011; Braxton et al., 2014). Therefore, this study specifically used the term student success to refer to completion, since the research took place within the context of a student success initiative aimed at increasing graduation and transfer rates.
Chapter 1 Summary and Organization of the Doctoral Thesis

As described, community colleges nationwide are facing growing pressures to improve graduation rates. Student success initiatives aimed at improving student outcomes require that colleges increase the capacity of their co-curricular support programs to meet the needs of their increasingly diverse student populations. However, little is known about the learning experiences and motivations of the employees who coordinate such programs. The qualitative case study sought to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the nature of learning among student services practitioners responsible for implementing a student success initiative in the California Community Colleges. Such research is relevant to community college students, practitioners, and college leaders, as well as the student affairs professional community.

Chapter 1 has provided an introduction to the study, including the background of the problem, research questions, significance, and the guiding theoretical framework. Next, Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to community college student services, the evolving student success movement, learning methods for student services practitioners, and the application of andragogy to professional learning. Chapter 3 then provides an in-depth overview of the research design, which includes the methodology, site and sample, data collection and analysis methods, and strategies for ensuring trustworthiness.

A detailed discussion of the research context and interview participants is provided in Chapter 4, along with a review of the study findings. Direct quotes from participants and related document and intake form data are presented to help the reader understand how overarching themes and key findings were developed. Finally, Chapter 5 reviews the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and existing literature, identifies the chief conclusions drawn from the research findings, and offers suggestions for research and practice.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This case study explored the nature of learning among employees responsible for the Student Success and Support Program at California Community Colleges. Therefore, the purpose of Chapter 2 is to share research that sheds light on the learning experiences and needs of community college student services practitioners who implement student success initiatives.

To that end, the literature review is presented in five interrelated themes: (a) an introduction to student services that contribute to student success, (b) an overview of the community college environment, (c) the student success and completion movement, (d) preparing practitioners to meet new challenges in higher education, and (e) the application of andragogy and adult learning theory to the higher education workplace. Since the study focused on practitioners within the California Community Colleges, relevant information about the system is infused throughout the literature review. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the significant insights gained from the literature and identifies implications for the study.

Introduction

Ambitious national and state student success initiatives aim to increase the number of community college graduates nationwide, with a renewed focus on helping students develop their academic skills, identify a career pathway, and decrease time-to-degree (Bragg & Durham, 2012; Jenkins & Woo, 2014; O’banion, 2010). This new attention on community college graduation rates requires the strengthening of co-curricular support programs in order to help foster student success (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Moore & Shulock, 2009).

Recent studies on community college student success acknowledge that students benefit from intentionally-designed and well-coordinated support services that help them manage their multiple academic and personal priorities (Karp, 2011; Nodine et al., 2012; Ozaki & Hornak,
2014). Such programs include financial aid, academic advising, career guidance, tutoring, student activities and engagement programs, peer support programs, and veterans’ services (McMurray & Sorrells, 2007; Sandeen, 2004; Tyrell, 2014b). Student services practitioners are responsible for developing, executing, and assessing these important programs and assisting students outside the classroom (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Kuh et al., 2014; Manning, 1996).

While studies on student success focus on student characteristics or offer suggestions on potential programs, there is a lack of research focused specifically on the personnel who coordinate these services and how they develop their competencies (Bensimon, 2007; Dalpes et al., 2015; Hirt et al., 2003; Ozaki et al., 2014). Yet, the intentional guidance provided by student services practitioners is essential for students to meet their academic and career goals (Karp, 2011; Kolenovic et al., 2013; Offenstein & Shulock, 2011). As Ebbers & Rivera (2014) posit, "many of the services that students need cannot be fulfilled by current [instructional] faculty skills sets" (p. 301). In particular, as more first-generation and underrepresented students enroll in college, they require greater assistance navigating the higher education environment through comprehensive orientation, tutoring, career guidance, academic counseling, and financial support programs coordinated by student services practitioners (Chapa, Schink, Horn, Flores, & Orfield, 2006; Kuh et al., 2011; Scott-Clayton, 2011).

Thus, attention to the needs of student services practitioners is essential if community colleges are to succeed in their efforts to improve student outcomes (AACC, 2012; Lunceford, 2014; Schreiner at al., 2011). To develop an understanding of the specific challenges faced by these practitioners, the next section examines literature related to community college students, employees, and new student success initiatives. As described in Chapter 1, this study utilized the term student services to describe the support programs provided on community college
campsuses, while student affairs was generally used to describe the overall professional field and community of practitioners and scholars who support students outside the classroom.

**The Community College Environment**

As discussed, most research in student affairs focuses on practitioners at four-year institutions, leaving the field with a limited view of community college practitioners (Ozaki et al., 2014; Tyrell, 2014b). This inadequate understanding of student services practice at community colleges is problematic, since research shows that "the mission and student types as well as campus environments" (Garber & Wills, 2015) influence student affairs practice at different types of institutions. Therefore, the experiences and needs of community college practitioners may be very different from their counterparts on four-year campuses due to dissimilar student populations and institutional missions (Burkard, et al., 2005; Hirt, 2006; Hirt et al., 2003; Kuk, 2015).

A search for peer-reviewed literature in online scholarly research databases using community college as the subject or keyword with additional search terms such student affairs, student services, staff, support services, employees, and personnel yielded few results that that shed light on the characteristics of community college student services practitioners. The limited research dedicated to community college personnel focused almost exclusively on classroom faculty (Alfano, 1993; Twombly & Townsend, 2008) or executive leaders (Basham & Mathur, 2010; Strom, Sanchez, & Downey-Schilling, 2011). Most results were focused on community college students, which is an appropriate place to begin in order to better understand the learning needs of student services personnel on these campuses.

**Student Characteristics**

That the experiences of student services practitioners at community colleges have
garnered such limited study is troubling, since they serve nearly half of all American undergraduate students (AACC, 2012, 2015; Kuk, 2015; Mellow, 2000). Many of these students are unprepared for college-level work and require additional academic and personal support services in order to persist to graduation (Habley et al., 2012; Karp, 2011; Singer, 2015). More than 50% of all new community college students require remediation in writing, reading, or mathematics (Complete College America, 2012). Students at two-year schools also require financial aid and disability support services at a higher level than their four-year counterparts (Boggs, 2011; Fike & Fike, 2008).

Additionally, community colleges have historically served as the entry point into higher education for underrepresented students (Lazerson, 2010; Lunceford, 2014; Mellow, 2000). In fact, 52% of all African American undergraduates, 57% of all Latino undergraduates, 61% of all Native American undergraduates, and 43% of all Asian and Pacific Islander undergraduates are enrolled in community colleges (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). Besides race and ethnicity, community college students also differ greatly in terms of age, educational ability, and socioeconomic status, with more first-generation college students, veterans, working adults, undocumented students, part-time students, and students with families enrolled at two-year colleges than four-year institutions (Chapa et al., 2006; Fike & Fike, 2008; Melguizo & Kosiewicz, 2013; Mullin, 2012).

**Community College Student Services Practitioners**

As more underprepared students gain access to higher education through community colleges, the need for quality support services increases (Culp, 2005a; Karp, 2011; Kolenovic et al., 2013; Lazerson, 2010). Student learning, persistence, and completion rates are all positively associated with active campus engagement and impactful student support services (Dalton &
Crosby, 2012; Kuh et al., 2011; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Such services at community colleges include admissions and registration, orientation, academic and career advising, placement testing, financial aid, disability support services, veterans' affairs, campus activities, and some two-year colleges even offer residence halls and international education programs (Culp, 2005a; Mattox & Creamer, 1998; Ousley, 2006; Spangler & Tyler, 2011; Tyrell, 2014b). The wide variety of students and programs at community colleges requires planning, coordination, and continued assessment by student services personnel who are effectively prepared and trained to serve within this increasingly complex learning environment (Culp, 2005a; Dalpes et al., 2015; Ebbers & Rivera, 2015; Kisker, 2005; Knight, 2014; Lunceford, 2014).

Development of effective education and training programs for practitioners faced with such challenges requires an understanding of their competencies and learning needs (Cooper & Miller, 1998; Salas et al., 2012). What is known about community college student services practitioners from the scholarly literature suggests that these employees may lack the preparation and support necessary to develop, execute, and evaluate effective support programs (Kisker, 2005). Researchers find that student support staff at community colleges may have less education, training, and professional experience in student affairs than practitioners at four-year institutions (Dalpes et al., 2015; Ebbers & Rivera, 2015; Culp, 2005a; Ousley, 2006; Mattox & Creamer, 1998; Tyrell, 2014b). For example, Dalpes et al. (2015) observe that few student affairs positions at community colleges require graduate degrees, and even if they do, may not require the degree to be in a college student affairs field.

Yet, community college student services practitioners may actually need a wider breadth of competencies than their four-year counterparts (Burkard et al., 2005; Lunceford, 2014; Tyrell, 2014b). Staff at some community colleges may be required to take on a greater number of tasks
and work at a faster pace than their colleagues at four-year institutions (Hirt, 2006; Hirt et al., 2003). For example, they may assist students with a variety of issues such as financial aid, academic advising, class registration, and referrals to social services in "one-stop" centers rather than in specialized offices, requiring them to understand many different institutional, state, and federal policies (Hirt, 2006; Ousley, 2006; Culp 2005b).

Additionally, community college student services staff members participate in accreditation activities (Scott, 2014), develop partnerships with the local community (Tyrell, 2014b), and collaborate with instructional faculty (Ozaki & Hornak, 2014; Singer, 2015) more often than practitioners at four-year institutions. Another area that diverges from four-year practice is the level of bureaucracy that community college practitioners work within (Hirt, 2006; Hirt et al., 2003). While Lovell & Kosten (2002) suggest that all student services practitioners should understand educational policy, community college practitioners may be most in need of this knowledge. Hirt (2006) notes that this "highly proceduralized environment" (p. 149) means that "the majority of change for student affairs professionals at community colleges is externally induced" (p. 150) which may also limit their autonomy and creativity.

**Employee Support and Ongoing Development**

Although effective support programs are essential to student success (Karp, 2011), there is an indication that community college student services practitioners may have less campus and supervisory support to hone the skills necessary to develop such programs. Culp (2005a) suggests that inadequate attention has been placed on student services professional development, stating that community colleges often fail to help these staff members build skills that enable them to create and assess new programs. This is corroborated by Delport (2015), who asserts that "community colleges have minimal capacity for providing professional development
opportunities for student services practitioners" (p. 89). Gibson-Harmon et al. (2002) agree that staff support and development is an area where most community colleges are falling behind. While their research does not focus specifically on student services, their findings suggest that staff members serving in non-faculty and non-management roles are often left out of campus professional development efforts.

As an example, the California Community Colleges' (CCC) own Student Success Initiative Professional Development Committee (2013) finds "limited opportunities for classified and administrative staff who .... are only marginally able to participate" (p. 83) in the learning opportunities provided to CCC employees. The committee recommends that all CCC employees be included in professional development efforts, emphasizing the importance of intentionally including non-instructional personnel in these activities. Additionally, in its report on CCC progress towards implementing the Student Success Act of 2012, the California Legislative Analyst's Office notes that not enough progress has been made on staff development efforts necessary in increasing student success (Taylor, 2014). Yet, they assert the importance of "supporting CCC faculty and staff with effective professional development programs" (Taylor, 2014, p. 16) in order to fully implement the requirements of the legislation.

Gibson-Harmon et al. (2002) suggest that disengagement with professional development and learning opportunities causes staff to feel unappreciated by their institutions, which leads to low morale, less commitment, and decreased efficiency. Increasing the quality of student services, therefore, may be just as much about providing staff support and encouragement as about training and development. Indeed, factors such as "support for learning and development by supervisors ... along with the availability of development and learning resources and policies that support and encourage development" (Maurer et al., 2003) build employee engagement,
promote autonomy, and ultimately support organizational success (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006).

An additional employee development issue confronting community colleges is the need for succession planning, as the aging higher education workforce retires at record numbers (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Eddy, 2012; Shults, 2001). In fact, it has been widely discussed that community colleges are facing an impending leadership crisis due to retirements and a shortage of qualified middle and upper-level managers prepared to move into executive management positions (AACC, 2015; Strom et al., 2011). The California Community Colleges, in particular, are experiencing a deficit in the number of qualified leaders prepared to move into executive leadership roles (Shulock, 2012). This stems from retirements, lack of qualified or interested candidates, and limited professional development programs (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Shulock, 2012). Therefore, the need for ongoing professional learning is not limited to frontline staff, but also reaches into middle and upper management.

In summary, the research on community colleges shows that although students require a high level of advisement and support, student services practitioners at these institutions may lack the preparation and resources necessary to develop, implement, and assess effective programs (Culp, 2005b; Kisker, 2005). Fewer professional development opportunities and inadequate institutional support might diminish the quality of student programs at the same time that community colleges need to redesign and strengthen services in order to increase graduation rates (Culp, 2005a; Fike & Fike, 2008; Kisker, 2005; Knight, 2014; O'banion, 2010; Offenstein & Shulock, 2009).

To that end, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) acknowledges that campuses must invest time and resources into preparing employees to meet the evolving needs of students if they are to succeed in improving graduation rates. The AACC 21st Century
Initiative calls on colleges to:

... make student success central to the work of everyone on campus .... [by] equipping all with the knowledge and skills required for their most effective work. Effecting this transformation will require a clear and steady commitment to professional development across the institution, focused relentlessly on student success. (AACC, 2012, p. 19)

To highlight the new programs and services practitioners are charged with implementing, the next section provides an overview of national and state initiatives aimed at increasing community college student completion.

The Student Success Movement

Although community colleges have historically been open-access institutions for students with many different goals, graduation and transfer rates are increasingly being viewed as the primary measures of success (Baldwin et al., 2011; Bragg & Durham, 2012; Habley et al., 2012; O'banion, 2010). Over the past two decades, the mission of community colleges has morphed from access to graduation, resulting in "a politicized discussion at the federal and state level regarding student completion" (Tyrell, 2014b, p. 69). This section discusses the shift towards completion and the implications for students and campuses.

Importance of Community College Completion

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that through 2022, jobs requiring some postsecondary education will grow faster than those that require a high school diploma (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Despite the need to increase the number of Americans with postsecondary training and credentials, only three in 10 community college students complete associate degrees or vocational certificates (AACC, 2012). Students who fail to complete postsecondary credentials have lower wages and overall higher rates of unemployment than college graduates (Johnson, 2009).

This is not just a problem for the individuals who fail to complete their goals; national
and state economies are also at risk if college attainment rates do not rise (Johnson, 2009; White House, 2015). For instance, Johnson (2009) asserts that "the gap between the demands of California's economy and the supply of college-educated workers poses a serious threat to the state's economic future" (p. 2).

To illustrate the relevance of community colleges in preparing the state's workforce, the Community College League of California (2015) notes that 80% of California's police officers and emergency medical technicians as well as 70% of registered nurses have received their credentials through community colleges. Thus, failure to increase degree and certificate completion rates at community colleges puts communities in jeopardy of not having enough trained personnel to fill critical vacancies in health, safety, and public services roles. Such issues have prompted a new focus on increasing graduation and transfer rates at community colleges in California and across the nation (Moore & Shulock, 2009).

**Commitment to Student Completion**

O'banion (2010) states that there are over a dozen national, state, and local initiatives focused specifically on community college completion. One such effort, the 2009 American Graduation Initiative (AGI), called for an increase of five million more community college graduates "with the ultimate goal of the United States once again becoming the international leader in proportion of citizenry with a postsecondary degree" (Kuntz et al., 2011, p. 489), emphasizing the important role community colleges play in the nation's continued prosperity. Although funding for AGI failed to pass the Senate, the proposal is an example of the level of attention community colleges have begun receiving from the federal government (Melguizo & Kosiewicz, 2013). The 2015 America's College Promise initiative, which proposes to provide two free years of community college education (White House, 2015), is another attempt by the
Obama Administration to support increased attainment of community college credentials.

Nonprofit advocacy organizations have also embraced the completion agenda (Moore & Shulock, 2009; Perna & Thomas, 2008). The American Association of Community Colleges launched the 21st Century Initiative in 2011 with the goal of helping community colleges produce an additional five million degrees and credentials (AACC, 2012). With support from various organizations, such as the Kresge Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the AACC (2012) seeks to increase current "unacceptably low" (p. viii) completion rates by encouraging a "collective responsibility for student success, eradicating achievement gaps" (p. 14). Another Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funded-project focused on community college student success is Completion by Design (CBD), a multi-year grant competition that provides resources and technical assistance for colleges to implement the CBD model and to address organizational issues that impact the student experience (About Us and Our Model, www.completionbydesign.org). Project sites have included community colleges in North Carolina, Florida, and Ohio.

State lawmakers are also putting pressure on community colleges to focus on student persistence and degree completion. For example, statewide legislation mandated an overhaul to the student services provided in the California Community Colleges (CCC), the largest public higher education system in the United States (Melguizo & Kosiewicz, 2013) in an effort to increase student success. The California Student Success Act of 2012 created the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP), which strengthened CCC policies regarding student enrollment, placement testing, orientation, and academic counseling by making student participation in these activities mandatory (Bahr et al., 2015).

For many years, the CCC focused on providing open access (Holy, 1961) with few
enrollment restrictions. Placement testing, developing an academic plan, and meeting with a counselor were optional activities (Offenstein & Shulock, 2011). The 2012 legislation moved the system toward a renewed focus on transfer and graduation, with student services departments taking on the largest share of the responsibility for ensuring that these reforms were enacted (Yamagata-Noji, n.d.). The bill's sponsor, State Senator Alan Lowenthal (D-Long Beach), remarked that "our goal -- our primary goal -- has to be one offering students a better path to graduation ... This bill is the first step toward a refocused community college system that is rededicated to student success and achievement" (CCC Chancellor's Office, 2012, p. 2).

These actions follow research suggesting that students can become better accustomed to the higher education environment through meaningful pre-entry information and support (Offenstein & Shulock, 2011; Scott-Clayton, 2011). Following this approach, many community colleges nationwide are now placing greater emphasis on the "front door" intake services that help new students understand academic expectations and acclimate to the college environment (Karp, 2011; Nodine et al., 2012). Additional efforts include strengthening academic and career counseling and redesigning the transfer process (Habley et al., 2012; Singer, 2015). In order to rise to these new challenges, administrators, staff, and faculty must refocus their efforts and mindsets on providing guided systems that help students navigate the college environment, focusing on persistence and retention (Bensimon & Harris, 2012; Jenkins & Woo, 2014; Schreiner et al., 2011).

**Challenges to Completion**

Meeting these new state and federal completion challenges may prove difficult. Unlike their peers enrolled at four-year institutions, community college students may not plan to complete a degree or credential (Habley et al., 2012; O'banion, 2010). Community college
students have a wider array of academic objectives, from short-term career training, degrees, and vocational certificates to transfer preparation, English language learning, and lifelong learning (O'banion, 2010; Bragg & Durham, 2012). Additionally, more students at two-year colleges may be unsure of their career aspirations and therefore need greater assistance in clarifying their academic goals, identifying an academic pathway, understanding the transfer process, and connecting to academic and personal supports (Scott-Clayton, 2011; Habley et al., 2012; Jenkins & Woo, 2014; Karp, 2011). These factors may lengthen the time it takes for community college students to earn a credential or transfer to a baccalaureate institution.

Such issues have been raised by community college leaders who question state and federal programs that tie funding to performance metrics focused on graduation rates (Braxton et al., 2014; Tyrell, 2014b). They argue that due to the many academic backgrounds and goals of community college students, the benchmarks applied to four-year institutions do not adequately measure the impact that community colleges have on student learning (Baldwin et al., 2011; Moore & Shulock, 2009; O'banion, 2010). For example, many community college students attend part-time, which lengthens the time for them to achieve a degree (Mullin, 2012). Further, Tyrell (2014b) notes that current metrics only consider the institution that graduates the student and does not consider other institutions, like community colleges, that have provided coursework on a student's path to a degree (p. 72).

Further, Bragg and Durham (2012) posit that if completion is used as the measure of success, new admissions and entrance programs may favor students who have greater chances of succeeding, and this will limit access for underrepresented students who lack knowledge of their college options and resources. They and Chapa et al. (2006) call on colleges to ensure access for underrepresented and academically at-risk students. In fact, Tyrell (2014b) specifically
advocates for community college student services practitioners "to take a center stage role in asserting to our many publics the ramifications of any current or new effort that may unintentionally limit access to higher education to those for whom community college is their only hope" (p. 73).

Finally, student success initiatives may flounder because the majority of research on community college retention has focused on student and institutional characteristics, while the role of faculty and staff has not been adequately addressed (Bensimon, 2007; Bensimon & Harris, 2012; Tyrell, 2014b). Of particular note is the lack of attention focused on community college personnel who develop and coordinate programs that increase students’ chances for achieving their goals. Bensimon (2007) criticizes this "invisibility of practitioners in the discourse on student success" (p. 443) as limiting to the advancement of completion initiatives.

The literature on the student success movement shows that student graduation initiatives are increasing at community colleges across the nation in an effort to expand the number of Americans earning postsecondary credentials (Bahr et al., 2015; Baldwin et al., 2011; Manning et al., 2014). While increasing college completion can serve as a driver to the economy (Johnson, 2009; White House, 2015), community colleges may struggle in meeting these goals due to the diverse academic objectives and educational backgrounds of their students (Boggs, 2011; Tyrell, 2014b) and a limited understanding of the learning needs of practitioners (Culp, 2005b; Bensimon, 2007; Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Tyrell, 2015b). For community colleges to increase student completion, they must deepen their commitment through supportive services such as orientation, academic advising, career counseling, and enhanced financial aid programs (Bragg & Durham, 2012; Chapa et al., 2006; Kolenovic et al., 2013; Nodine et al., 2012). Thus, preserving access and increasing completion may hinge on the work of well-trained student
services practitioners who can effectively develop and implement programs that increase student success (Culp, 2005a; Habley et al., 2012; Manning et al., 2014; Mullin, 2012; Tyrell, 2014b). To better understand how practitioners prepare for these challenging roles, the following section discusses professional learning and development methods in student affairs.

Preparing Practitioners to Meet Higher Education Challenges

Changes in higher education necessitate a high-quality student services workforce that is prepared to tackle the challenges that impact student completion (Haley et al., 2015; Janosik, et al., 2006; Manning et al., 2014). In response to these developments, several scholars argue that student services can play an important role in the transformation of colleges as they strive to meet increasing demands for access and accountability (Hirt, 2007; Porterfield et al., 2011; Tyrell, 2014b). Roper (2011) speculates that student services practitioners have the potential to improve not only the success of individual students, but also the ability of institutions to flourish during times of change since these professionals are committed to supporting underrepresented students. Braxton et al. (2009) further note that students are "more likely to stay in college if they have clear signals that the college is committed to them" (p. 9). The services provided by caring and supportive practitioners help to demonstrate that commitment (Helfgott, 2005; Manning et al., 2014; Schreiner et al., 2011).

As these researchers indicate, there remains an important role for student services programs and practitioners in today's tumultuous higher education environment. With the need to sharpen their skills, ongoing learning and professional development activities can help practitioners enhance their abilities to meet these challenges (Grace-Odeleye, 1998, p. 84). However, as Cooper and Miller (1998) postulate, it is necessary to understand "how and why" (p. 56) student service practitioners currently develop their skills and competencies in order to know
what new learning is necessary. Therefore, this section reviews the ways that student services practitioners gain knowledge and skills related to coordinating student programs and services.

**Graduate School**

Although there is no specific degree or certification required to enter the profession, a graduate degree in student affairs or higher education related fields is the typical entry-level qualification for a student services role (Cuyjet et al., 2009; Janosik et al, 2006; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Maintaining this assumption, Haley et al. (2015) assert that "learning for student affairs professionals begins in graduate school" (p. 325).

The graduate curriculum in student affairs provides practitioners with an understanding of student development theories, program planning, time management, and problem-solving competencies, as well as advising and counseling skills (Burkard et al., 2005; Reynolds, 2011; Herdlein, 2004). Additionally, graduate programs provide students with an opportunity to gain workplace skills through internships in college and university student services departments, working under the guidance of an experienced professional (Liddell, Wilson, Pasquesi, Hirschy, & Boyle, 2014). This supervised practice allows practitioners-in-training to test their program development and student advising skills while engaging in context-based, reflective learning and self-assessment (Cooper et al., 2013; Hansman, 2000).

While many practitioners enter the workforce with graduate education, some may begin their student services careers without any formal training in student affairs, especially at community colleges (Dalpes et al., 2015; Ebbers & Rivera, 2015; Kisker, 2005; Mattox & Creamer, 1998; Tyrell, 2014b). Thus, while graduate education provides significant learning opportunities for many employees working in student services, not all practitioners will have this experience.
Ongoing Professional Development Activities

While scholarly focus regarding student affairs preparation has primarily been concerned with graduate school curricula, researchers do agree that all practitioners must continually update their skills through career-spanning professional development in order to effectively serve students (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Herdlein, 2004; Janosik et al., 2006; Knight, 2014; Lunceford, 2014; Porterfield, et al., 2011; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Reynolds, 2011). As Grace-Odeleye (1998) emphasizes, "development programs can enhance staff abilities to understand and cope with rapid changes in institutional orientation, focus, funding, and demographics and thus redefine ways to provide good student affairs practices" (p. 84).

Carpenter and Stimpson (2007) define professional development as the process of improvement undertaken throughout one’s career in order to constantly update professional abilities and skills. These researchers articulate the need for formal professional development in student services when they state, "instinct, personality, and even successful experience are no substitute for appropriate professional education, reflection, and continual learning" (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007, p. 280). Consequently, several researchers call on practitioners to embark on a process of life-long professional development and growth in order to both serve students effectively and strengthen the field of student affairs (Carpenter and Stimpson, 2007; Janosik et al., 2006; Lunceford, 2014; Habley et al., 2015; Herdlein, 2004).

To identify such learning activities, Reynolds (2011) asks entry and mid-level practitioners to rank the experiences that most contribute to their skill enhancement. While the study endorses graduate coursework as the most important educational method, participants also state that facilitated discussions at staff meetings, serving on committees, and participating in online seminars enhance their skills and knowledge. Daley (1999), Collin, Paloniemi, and
Herranen (2015), and Cheetham and Chivers (2001) also acknowledge that teamwork, dialogue with colleagues, and support from supervisors provide valuable work-based learning experiences for professionals.

In their study of student services practitioners at all experience levels, Haley et al. (2015) find that previous on-the-job experiences and professional development activities "tied to their current context or specific professional position" (p. 321) provide the greatest learning for practitioners. Similarly, Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) identify that practical, hands-on experiences, discussions of case studies, and reflective problem solving with supervisors or mentors helps new professionals synthesize their learning. They emphasize the need for fostering a culture of lifelong learning in student affairs, with supervisor support as key to the development of such a climate.

Finally, Herdlein (2004) contends that ongoing development of student support staff is so crucial to the quality of the profession that student affairs professional associations must take the lead in organizing such efforts. He asserts that it is vital to "develop structures for continued professional development over the lifetime of a career. Our graduate preparation programs, professional associations, and organizations ... can plan a major role in this regard" (p. 69).

**Involvement in Professional Associations**

As Herdlein (2004) suggests, a way to increase skills and competencies outside formal education is to become involved in professional organizations. Cooper and Miller (1998) posit that interacting with professional peers helps student affairs and services staff develop a supportive network, while Maurer et al. (2003) further recognize that an employee's development is impacted by the "entire social system in which he or she is embedded" (p. 719).

Engagement with professional associations is seen as critical in student affairs learning
and development, since involvement provides opportunities for networking, ongoing training, access to research and best practices, and new viewpoints (Bradbury et al., 2015; Chernow, Cooper, and Wilson, 2003; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Reynolds, 2011). Due to these crucial peer-to-peer learning activities, Wenger (2011) describes professional associations as "communities of practice" (p. 5) that allow practitioners to learn from one another while advancing a common goal (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999).

While professional association membership is important in the preparation and socialization of new professionals (Liddell et al., 2014), executive leaders also benefit from the supportive networks developed through organization involvement. Chernow et al. (2003) find that involvement in professional associations fluctuates as practitioners’ needs and roles change, but they note, "successful professionals incorporate association involvement in all stages of their career[s]" (p. 55).

Many practitioners nationwide are members of one or both of the largest professional associations in student affairs, College Student Educators International (known historically as ACPA) and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (known historically as NASPA) (Chernow et al., 2003; Cooper et al., 2011). The networking and training opportunities provided by NASPA and ACPA are extensive, with a wide variety of seminars, regional and national conferences, and online resources that help practitioners throughout the United States and beyond to learn from one another (Chernow et al., 2003; Marcus, 1999). Additionally, these associations publish research on student affairs topics, disseminate newsletters to share best practices from the field, and provide opportunities for practitioners to lead committees and task forces (Bradbury et al., 2015; Schwartz, 1998).

However, few community college personnel are involved in the major national student
affairs professional associations (Dalpes et al., 2015; Munsch & Cortez, 2014). Consistent with this assertion, Delport (2015) reports that none of the participants in her study of California Community Colleges (CCC) student services practitioners were members of ACPA or NASPA, and only three of the seven participants were familiar with these organizations (pp. 85-86). Further, in another study of CCC student services practitioners, Gutierrez (2013) finds that those who are not involved in student affairs organizations are unaware of resources available to practitioners nationwide, and consequently miss out on professional development and networking within the field.

To summarize, the research in student affairs learning and professional development concludes that that completion of graduate programs, involvement in professional associations, building supportive networks, on-the-job experiences, and participating in ongoing training activities are effective ways to develop and enhance skills to support students (Chernow et al, 2003; Haley et al., 2015; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Further, student services practitioners require additional learning as their roles or positions change, when they assume additional levels of responsibility, and if they move to different types of institutions (Helfgot, 2005; Hirt, 2006; Reason & Kimball, 2012; Reynolds, 2011). This type of education, aimed at relevant and problem-based learning (Merriam, 2009a), is a focus of adult learning theory. Therefore, the next section discusses the adult learning theory of andragogy and its applicability to practitioner learning in higher education.

**Adult Learning in the Workplace**

As discussed, ongoing changes in higher education require that student services practitioners continually upgrade their skills and knowledge in order to meet the evolving needs of student populations (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Ebbers & Rivera, 2015; Grace-Odeleye,
This is especially crucial in the community college environment, where "ever-expanding expectations, mission, and goals" (Kuk, 2015, p. 52) require personnel to implement campus-based and statewide mandates (Habley et al., 2012; Hirt, 2006; Knight, 2014). As these campuses refocus efforts on student success legislation and initiatives, student services staff must build their abilities to help students persist to graduation (Knight, 2014; Lunceford, 2014; O'banion, 2010)

This need for relevant, problem-based skill development aligns with adult learning theory, which focuses on identifying appropriate methods for teaching and learning in adulthood (Hansman, 2000; Mezirow, 1981; Yang, 2004). One of the most influential and enduring models of adult learning is andragogy (Merriam, 2001; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991), which provides a suitable lens for exploring professional development of student services practitioners.

Concepts in Andragogy

Developed by Alexander Knapp in Germany in the 1880s (Rachal, 2002), the term andragogy was made popular in the United States by Malcolm Knowles, who began using the term in 1968 and pioneered its use as a model to explain the differences between adult learners and children (Knowles, 1990; Rachal, 2002; Samaroo, Cooper, & Green, 2013). Knowles' concept of andragogy advances notions offered by Lindeman (1926, as cited by Knowles, 1990), who posited that adult educators must recognize the valuable experiences that adults bring to the learning environment (p. 195) and that problem-based learning, or a "situation-approach" (p. 193) enhances adult learning. The following six assumptions form the basis of andragogy:

(1) Readiness: adults develop learning needs as their roles or situations change;
(2) Prior experience: adults utilize their past work and life experiences to inform and support new learning;
(3) Need to know: adults need to understand how new learning will be useful to them and will evaluate the benefits gained from learning and the consequences of not learning;

(4) Orientation: adults are interested in relevant, problem-based knowledge that can be immediately applied to work or life;

(5) Self-concept: adults are independent learners who need to be involved in developing their own learning goals and activities; and


Additionally, Knowles (1974) provides principles for designing adult learning experiences, which he calls "process elements" (p. 117). He suggests that adult education must be context-based and relevant, as well as provide a respectful and supportive environment that is conducive to learning (Knowles, 1974; 1995; Knowles et al., 1998). These principles underscore the andragogical focus of treating adults as independent, self-motivated learners whose learning needs evolve throughout the course of their lives (Knowles et al., 2015; Lawler & King, 2003; St. Clair, 2002).

Adult learning theorists and researchers have debated the most salient points of andragogy. Mezirow (1981) states that "andragogy, as a professional perspective of adult educators, must be defined as an organized and sustained effort to assist adults to learn in a way that enhances their ability to function as self-directed learners" (p. 21). Daily and Landis (2014) even suggest that self-directedness is the most essential concept in andragogy, as it encourages the learner to take responsibility for his or her own learning. Further, Rachel (2002) highlights the learner-instructor collaborative element of andragogy, suggesting that adult learners "should
play a significant or even primary role" (p. 221) in developing learning goals.

Although these scholars may emphasize certain aspects of adult learning over others, all concede that the assumptions and principles of andragogy help shed light on the conditions favorable for learning in adulthood and have provided the basis for further research in the field (Merriam, 2001; Knowles et al., 2015). Further, as Houle (1996, as cited in Merriam, 2001) acknowledges, "andragogy remains the most learner centered of all patterns of adult educational programming" (Merriam, 2001, p. 6). Although several adult learning theories have since gained in popularity, such as transformational learning (Mezirow, 2000) and experiential learning (Kolb, 1982), Knowles' concepts in andragogy continue to influence research and practice in adult education and training (Merriam & Bierema, 2013; Terehoff, 2002; Yang, 2004).

**Concerns Within Andragogy**

Despite the enduring influence of andragogy on the adult learning community, debates have arisen regarding the theory's scientific basis and its applicability in multiple contexts (Merriam, 2001; Rachal, 2002). In fact, Merriam and Caffarella (1991) state that while andragogy has remained popular, it "has also caused more controversy, philosophical debate, and critical analysis than any other concept/theory/model proposed thus far" (pp. 249-250).

Brookfield (1992) challenges Knowles' assertion that adults are inherently self-directed, while Samaroo et al. (2013) associate the characteristic of self-direction with developmental maturity rather than age or adulthood status. St. Clair (2002) notes that andragogy's focus on the individual learner may make it less effective than social learning theories when considering how adults learn in group settings. Finally, several theorists have also asserted that andragogy is not a concise theory of adult learning, but rather a set of beliefs about the characteristics of the preferred adult learner (Merriam, 2001; McLean, 2006; Yang, 2003). Even Knowles (1989)
ultimately begins to describe andragogy as "a model of assumptions about learning or a conceptual framework that serves as a basis for an emergent theory" (p. 112).

**Andragogy in Higher Education Training and Development**

Despite ongoing debate, andragogy continues to influence teaching and learning in adulthood (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). Merriam (2009a) posits that "adult learning is at the heart of all adult education practice .... from adult basic education to continuing professional education" (p. 455). Indeed, over the last decade concepts of adult learning have been applied to development and training in the workplace (Marsick, 1988, 2009; Yang, 2004).

Knowles (1974) himself connected andragogy to human resources development, postulating that organizational success is enhanced when trainers involve employees in developing their own learning goals and help employees see how past experiences enhance their ability to learn new skills. The application of an andragogical learning model to professional development is based on the idea that learning experiences for adults may be more likely to happen in workplace settings since workers are often no longer enrolled in formal education programs (Marsick, 1988, 2009). Moreover, andragogy's focus on helping adults assess their own learning needs serves as a useful component of workplace learning, since developing an effective training program cannot be accomplished without understanding the needs, motivations, and goals of learners (Noe & Wilk, 1993; Salas et al., 2012).

The emerging focus on workplace professional development as adult learning provides insight for student services practitioners, who must continually upgrade their skills and knowledge in order to meet evolving challenges in higher education (Ebbers & Rivera, 2015; Roper, 2011). King and Lawler (2003) assert, "educators themselves need to be viewed as adult learners" (p. 1), with training and ongoing developmental programs based on adult learning
concepts. They and others have applied andragogical assumptions of adult learning to professional development in education (Lawler & King; 2000; Lawler, 2003; Terehoff, 2002; Zuber-Skerritt, 1997) in an effort to build the skills of personnel who teach and support students.

For example, Lawler & King’s (2000) model of faculty learning requires that facilitators create a climate of trust, promote collaborative inquiry, foster learning for action, and build on the experiences learners bring to the learning environment (as summarized by Lawler, 2003, pp. 17-19). Andragogical assumptions and principles such as creating a respectful climate, involving learners in assessing their own learning needs, and focusing on problem-based and relevant learning have influenced this model. While Lawler and King (2000) focus on faculty, it is also appropriate to utilize principles of andragogy to explore student services professional development because such practitioners are often seen as educators outside the classroom (Manning, 1996; McMurray & Sorrels, 2007; Kuh et al., 2014; Winston, Creamer, & Miller, 2001). These staff members provide important educational and developmental opportunities for students and must continually update and refine their skills so that they are able to address the needs of changing student populations (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Ebbers & Rivera, 2015; Grace-Odeleye, 1998; Wartell, 2013).

Hence, Diaz (2013) utilizes Lawler and King’s (2000) model in the theoretical framework for her research on the attitudes of chief student services officers related to professional development in community colleges. For participants, "attributes that positively impact their engagement in professional development included personal interest, self-directed behaviors, motivation, and readiness to learn" (Diaz, 2013, p. 131), which are key assumptions of adult learning theory. These supervisors articulate an understanding of adult learning concepts and are in support of professional development for their staff members. However, Diaz also notes that
institutional challenges, such as finding appropriate training opportunities and funding these activities (p. 156), remain an issue on many community college campuses even though ongoing professional learning is valued.

Such concerns have recently inspired more scholarship on the learning needs of community college student services practitioners, including the first edition of the *Handbook for Student Affairs in Community Colleges* (2015). In this book, Ebbers and Rivera (2015) propose an apprenticeship model for training community college student services practitioners. Although they do not explicitly call their model andragogical, Ebbers & Rivera suggest a training program that provides education based on the interests of the practitioners; on-the-job training guided by supportive, experienced professionals; learning experiences that build upon the strengths and knowledge of practitioners; focus on current issues facing students and campuses; and the use of a professional development plan that includes goals and methods determined in collaboration between the practitioner and supervisor/instructor (pp. 307-308).

The focus on relevant, problem-based learning follows Knowles’ (1995) assumptions and process principles, with specific attention to goals determined by practitioners and recognition that they bring experiences to the learning environment that can inform their continued skill-building. While only recently proposed, the Ebbers and Rivera (2015) model provides a new concept for student services professional learning. This model further demonstrates how adult learning concepts could inform professional learning and training for community college student services practitioners.

As discussed, the adult learning model of andragogy proposed by Knowles (1974, 1990, 1995) focuses on self-diagnosis of learning and training needs, use of past experiences to enhance new skills, and problem-based learning (Daily & Landis, 2014; Knowles et al., 2012;
Merriam, 2001). In this model, adults are viewed as internally motivated learners who need and desire relevant learning that is immediately applicable to their lives or work environments (Knowles et al., 1998). The central components of andragogy have been applied to models of professional development in the workplace, including education, amid efforts to promote ongoing learning opportunities for employees (Lawler & King, 2000; King & Lawler, 2003; Terehoff, 2002; Yang, 2004).

**Literature Review Summary**

The aim of this literature review was to explore what was known about the experiences and learning needs of community college student services practitioners. Research threads focused on the community college environment, the new success and completion agenda, how practitioners develop professional skills and knowledge, and the adult learning theory of andragogy.

The literature shows that the environment of higher education is evolving rapidly, as colleges and universities strive to meet the needs of increasing numbers of underprepared students (Fike & Fike, 2008). Community colleges are confronted with pressures from state and federal initiatives to increase graduation rates, even though they serve diverse student populations with varying academic backgrounds and career goals (Braxton et al., 2014; Chapa et al., 2006; Habley et al., 2012; O'banion, 2010). Faced with the need to enhance supportive services, student services professionals have the potential to help colleges ensure student access and improve degree completion rates (Manning et al., 2014; Roper, 2011; Tyrell, 2014b). Accordingly, researchers agree that attention to the preparation of student services practitioners is essential in order to help practitioners provide high quality services that support student success and to advance the field of student affairs (Haley et al., 2015; Janosik et al., 2006;
Research indicates that practitioners develop their skills, knowledge, and competencies through a variety of informal and formal learning opportunities. Informal activities such as involvement in professional associations, attending conferences or workshops, or problem-solving during staff meetings provide ongoing opportunities for student services professionals to learn about issues that impact their students and campuses (Chernow et al., 2003; Cooper et al., 2013; Reynolds, 2011; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). For many practitioners, formal learning is obtained through master's degree programs in student affairs related fields (Cooper & Miller, 1998; Haley et al., 2015; Harned & Murphy, 1998). However, several authors note that community college practitioners lack graduate-level training, and if they do hold master's degrees, their education is often in fields unrelated to student affairs (Dalpes et al., 2015; Kisker, 2005; Tyrell, 2014b).

Finally, ongoing professional development is a key component for practitioner learning. Even if practitioners hold graduate degrees in student affairs related fields, they must continually update their skills through career-spanning professional development in order to meet the evolving needs of their students (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Reason & Kimball, 2012). Therefore, student services practitioners should be provided with ongoing learning and development opportunities in order to keep their skills current (Culp, 2005b; Grace-Odeleye, 1998; Lunceford, 2014). However, community colleges may not invest adequate time and resources into development efforts for student services staff (Culp, 2005a; Delport, 2015; Kisker, 2005). This problem has been highlighted in California by the State Legislative Analyst's Office (Taylor, 2014) and the community college system's Student Success Initiative Professional Development Committee (2013), as both indicate that not enough progress has been
made on providing professional development to community college personnel in order to advance student success.

As demonstrated, community colleges will need to increase the quality of student support programs in order to address new mandates and meet the needs of their diverse student populations (Culp, 2005b; Karp, 2011). As the American Association for Community Colleges (2012) notes, increasing success rates at community colleges requires a commitment to providing professional learning opportunities to all campus employees. The use of adult learning concepts such as those found in andragogy can serve as an appropriate framework for exploring the learning experiences of community college student services practitioners, as the emphasis on relevant and problem-based learning (Knowles, 1995; Knowles et al., 2015) addresses the current challenges faced by practitioners who must implement ambitious legislative initiatives focused on student completion.

**Gaps in the Literature**

Most student affairs research focuses on the experiences of practitioners at four-year institutions who may have very different responsibilities and roles than practitioners at two-year institutions (Garber & Wills, 2015; Lunceford, 2014; Hirt, 2006; Hirt et al., 2003). As described, the discussion of community college practitioners in scholarly research is limited to generalizations regarding their lack of graduate-level training and resources (Culp, 2005b; Dalpes et al., 2015; Ebbers & Rivera, 2015; Kisker, 2005). The limited attention to student services practice at two-year institutions is problematic, since community college student populations are overall more diverse in terms of academic ability, age, ethnicity, goals, and socioeconomic status than four-year student populations (AACC, 2012, 2015; Fike & Fike, 2008; Provasnik & Planty, 2008) and require advanced support and guidance in order to persist
and graduate (Karp, 2011). Consequently, practitioners at community colleges require a wide variety of skills and knowledge aimed at developing, coordinating, and assessing effective support services (Tyrell, 2014b; Garber & Wills, 2015).

Despite this issue, there is little qualitative or quantitative data available that provide insight on the ways that community college student services practitioners increase their professional skills and knowledge. In particular, it is unknown how practitioners charged with coordinating and implementing student completion programs learn about barriers and strategies related to student success (Bensimon, 2007). Yet, the creation of training and development activities requires knowledge of employee learning needs, goals, preferences, and motivations (Knowles, 1978; Noe & Wilk, 1993; Maurer et al., 2003; Salas et al., 2012). It is unclear how supervisors, campuses, and professional associations can support the learning and development needs of community college student services personnel because there is limited scholarly research focusing on the experiences of these practitioners.

As demonstrated, it is not possible to fully understand the nature of learning among community college student services practitioners based on the existing scholarly literature, yet the knowledge and skills of these practitioners are vital to the efficacy of student success initiatives (Bensimon, 2007; Ebbers & Rivera, 2015; Roper, 2011). Thus, the literature review supported the need for this study, which explored the learning experiences of community college personnel who were implementing student success initiatives.

With the background literature reviewed and the need for this study supported, Chapter 3 will provide a discussion of the research design, site and participants, data collection, and data analysis.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology of the study, beginning with a description of the research purpose and questions. This is followed by an explanation of the chosen research tradition and approach. Next, a review of the research design is provided, including a description of participants, data collection strategy, and data analysis methods. The chapter ends with a discussion of trustworthiness and the researcher's role.

Purpose and Research Questions

As Chapter 2 demonstrated, there is a need to better understand the experiences of community college student services practitioners. Although practitioners are required to implement new student success initiatives in order to increase retention and graduation rates, little is known regarding their competencies, education, and training, and in particular, how they learn about student success. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to gain insight into the nature of learning among community college student services practitioners responsible for implementing student success initiatives. Specifically, the study focused on community college staff members implementing the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP) as part of California's Student Success Act of 2012. In order to explore this issue, two broad research questions guided the study:

(1) How do community college student services practitioners in California learn about issues related to student success?

(2) Why do community college student services practitioners in California participate in learning related to student success?

narrowing to only the questions that are most necessary in order to understand a phenomenon under investigation. In this way, researchers "can avoid being distracted by interesting (but irrelevant) digressions" (para. 1). Accordingly, focusing on just two research questions for this thesis allowed wide-ranging information about practitioner learning methods, approaches, and motivations to emerge.

**Research Tradition**

The study sought to examine the experiences of community college student services practitioners, who are infrequently involved in research related to education, training, and professional development within the field of student affairs (Garber & Wills, 2015; Hirt, 2006; Ozaki et al., 2014). Gaining a deep understanding of the issue required interaction with practitioners and a thorough review of the initiatives they were implementing. Therefore, findings useful for both research and practice were discovered through qualitative methods. Because this approach provides a holistic exploration of issues, Arminio and Hultgren (2002) assert that "increasingly, qualitative research informs student affairs practice" (p. 447).

Qualitative research is useful when studying an issue that cannot be explained through statistical analysis (Creswell, 2013), and "when little is known about the phenomenon under study" (Brown, Stevens, Troiano, & Schneider, 2002, p. 173). By exploring many facets of a problem, qualitative researchers are able to illustrate an issue in ways that numerical data alone cannot. Put differently, "a thickly described tale ... attracts more attention than the statistic" (Magolda & Weeks, 2002, p. 500).

Creswell (2013) further explains that qualitative research is particularly effective "when we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. This can only be established by talking directly with people ... and allowing them to tell their stories" (p. 48). Hence, the study was also
influenced by an interpretive paradigm that helped the researcher understand the phenomenon from those experiencing it (Butin, 2010; Pontorotto, 2005). The interpretive paradigm holds that there are no absolutes, only multiple, complex interpretations of reality (Creswell, 2013). The research design directly involved practitioners in data collection, allowing them to describe their own learning experiences, motivations, and needs. This allowed the research to elicit multiple ways and reasons practitioners learned about student success.

**Research Method**

The study employed an instrumental case study method. Yin (2002) explains that case study research is useful "when a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control" (p. 9). This is because the case study method allows the researcher to develop a deep understanding of "questions, situations ... arising from everyday practice" (Merriam, 2009b, p. 43). Moreover, Stake (1978) emphasizes that case study research is "suited to expansionist rather than reductionist pursuits" (p. 7) because it allows for far-reaching exploration of an issue.

Yin (2004) further explains that case studies are useful "when boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" and when the goal is to explore a current issue through a "holistic, real-world perspective" (Yin, 2014, p. 2) rather than one that is purely historical or theoretical in nature. Therefore, Stake (2013) suggests that case study researchers spend time learning about the political context, history, and previous related research to gain a full understanding of the contemporary issue under investigation.

The goal of an instrumental case study is to explore how the specific case examined may shed light on an overall phenomenon and offer insight on the issue in other settings (Grandy, 2010; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Consequently, Merriam (2009b) concludes that "the case itself is
important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent" (p. 43).
Further, the case study method can be used "to capture and formalise [sic] the knowledge of
practitioners" (Iacono, Brown, & Holtham, 2009, p. 40). By using this method, the phenomenon
of learning about student success from the perspective of practitioners was explored not just at a
general level, but also within the authentic, real-time situation (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Stake, 2013;
Yin, 2014) of implementing a current initiative.

Thus, the nature of this study aligned with the uses of case study research, since it
devoted to expand the current knowledge of community college student services practice
through in-depth exploration of the learning experiences and motivations of practitioners, the
legislated programs they were implementing, and the setting in which they practiced. The study
explored a contemporary problem of practice using how and why research questions, and the
researcher had no control over the event (i.e. student success initiative) central to the study
(Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003, 2014). Using an instrumental case study design allowed this research to
be situated specifically within the context, called a bounded-system (Creswell, 2013), of the
Student Success and Support Program in California Community Colleges, and offered insight
into practitioner learning about student success in other settings (Grandy, 2010; Stake, 1995).

Research Design

Site

The study took place within the California Community Colleges (CCC), a 113-campus
system of publicly funded, two-year colleges focused on career training, basic skills education,
transfer preparation, and lifelong learning (Community College League of California, 2015;
Offenstein & Shulock, 2011). Enrolling two million students annually, the CCC system is the
largest system of public education in the United States (Foundation for California Community
Colleges, 2015; Melguizo & Kosiewicz, 2013).

This research site was selected because the CCC system was in the process of implementing a variety of student persistence and completion initiatives as part of California's Student Success Act of 2012, which mandated the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP). The 2014-15 academic year was the first year of full implementation of mandatory SSSP student matriculation components: new student orientation, placement testing, academic advising, development of an education plan, and follow-up services for at-risk students. Thus, this study provided a window into the experiences of practitioners at a particular stage of implementation.

Further, the system represented a wide variety of campus sizes and types as well as an extremely diverse student population in terms of race, ethnicity, age, ability, and academic goals (Bahr et al., 2015; Offenstein & Shulock, 2011). Since the CCC system enrolls one-fifth of all community college students in the nation (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2015), and because "California policies are often emulated in other states" (Thelin, 2011, p. 300), utilizing this site was advantageous to the goals of the study. As the purpose of an instrumental case study is to illuminate an overall phenomenon and offer insight on the issue in other settings (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995), the size, diversity, and influence of the CCC system provided a rich site to explore the phenomenon of employee learning related to student success.  

**Selection of Participants**

As with most qualitative research, purposeful sampling was employed to recruit participants who could provide relevant information about the topic being explored (Creswell, 2012). In purposeful sampling, researchers "intentionally select individuals or sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012, p. 206). This form of sampling is common in case studies, as researchers seek to include cases that will provide the most useful
information related to the issue being studied (Merriam, 2009b; Stake, 1995). Accordingly, the sampling strategy sought to include participants who were: (1) employed at community colleges in California, and (2) had responsibilities for implementing at least one component of the Student Success and Support Program.

Further, a maximal variation sample strategy was used to select participants who could provide multiple perspectives on the issue being studied (Creswell, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Since student success had become the responsibility of many student services practitioners across California, participants from different community colleges, locations, job classifications, and student success related responsibilities were recruited for this study. Another advantage in utilizing this strategy is that maximal variation sampling also increased generalizability because it allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of many facets influencing the phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 229).

**Recruitment and Access**

The researcher obtained a list of all CCC Chief Student Services Officers (CSSO) from the public website of the CCC CSSO Association (http://cssofficers.org). After downloading the list, the researcher confirmed that the CSSO listed for each college was current by checking the website of each individual campus and making edits as necessary.

An introductory email (Appendix A) was then sent to all 113 CCC CSSOs inviting them to participate in the study or to forward the message to other student services personnel responsible for SSSP components on their campuses. This introductory email explained the purpose and goals of the study and included a link to a web-based Participant Intake Form (Appendix B). This form gathered information about practitioner demographics as well as their responsibilities and learning experiences related to the student success initiative. Practitioners
willing to participate in interviews were asked to provide their email addresses and telephone numbers at the end of the intake form in order to be contacted by the researcher for further information.

After two weeks, the recruitment email had generated 24 responses. Intake questions were reviewed to identify participants who met the study criteria; that is, practitioners who worked at CCC campuses and had SSSP responsibilities (Creswell, 2012). At this point, of the 24 practitioners who had completed the form, seven had volunteered for interviews and all met the study criteria. Potential participants were contacted by email to discuss the study details, confirm interest in participation, and schedule an interview. All seven volunteers confirmed their interest and scheduled interviews.

Creswell (2012) states that reminders are often necessary when soliciting web-based responses from potential participants, since they might put these requests aside, planning to respond later but ultimately forgetting. Therefore, a reminder was emailed to all CSSOs four weeks after the initial call for participants was sent. The introductory email was also sent to six members of the researcher's community college professional network asking that they help recruit potential participants. This second announcement resulted in 11 new Participant Intake Form responses with five additional interview volunteers, all of whom were qualified based on the study criteria. Again, potential participants were contacted by email to provide study details, confirm interest in participation, and schedule an interview. Of these five volunteers, four responded to the follow-up email and scheduled interviews. The additional volunteer did not respond to two emails and a telephone call from the researcher over a two-week period and was therefore removed from the list of potential participants.

Ultimately, it would have been unnecessary to include a 12th participant, since by the
ninth interview, clear themes related to the research questions had emerged. Interviews 10 and 11 confirmed and supported the emergent categories and themes rather than unique themes or ideas (Aaltio & Heilmann, 2010). This is known as redundancy, or the point when "new data will not provide any new information or insight for the developing categories" (Creswell, 2012, p. 433). Therefore, the online Participant Intake Form was closed after the 11th interview and no additional participants were recruited.

**Description of Participants**

Descriptions of the 11 interview participants is provided in Chapter 4. The following section provides an overview of the demographics of all 35 Participant Intake Form respondents, followed by a summary of all respondents in Table 1.

**Gender identity.** Participants were asked to report their gender identity on the Participant Intake Form. Twenty-two participants identified as female, 12 as male, and one respondent declined to state a gender. In order to be as inclusive as possible, the intake form also included the categories *Transgender* and *Other*. No respondents chose these options.

**Race or ethnicity.** Participants were also asked to self-identify their race or ethnicity. No participants identified as Native American or Alaskan Native. Three participants identified as Asian, Pacific Islander, or Filipino; two as Black or African American; seven as Hispanic or Latino; 19 as White or Caucasian; one as Two or More Races; and three chose Decline to State.

**Areas of responsibility.** Participants included 24 administrators, three faculty, and eight classified support staff. They included all areas related to the student success initiative: 20 respondents indicated that they were responsible for orientation; 19 were responsible for overall coordination of the campus SSSP; 12 for student education plans; 10 for assessment; 10 for budget management; 10 for follow-up services for at-risk students; eight for related support
services such as student outreach, enrollment, or financial aid; six for research related to student success and matriculation; and six for developing and administering related policies. Note that because each participant may have had multiple SSSP responsibilities, the total exceeds the number of respondents.

**Experience and highest education levels.** Participants had between 0 to 5 and more than 21 years of experience working within the CCC system. The majority of participants held a graduate degree as their highest completed education level. Nineteen had a master's degree, 12 had a doctorate, and one participant had a post-master's graduate certificate. One participant earned a bachelor's degree, one earned an associate's degree, and one earned a career or technical certificate.

**Geographic location within California.** Seventeen Participant Intake Form respondents represented institutions in Northern California, which was defined as San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento, North Coast, and Far Northern Areas. With 12 respondents, the next highest region represented was Southern California, defined as Los Angeles, San Diego, Inland Empire, and Deserts. Six respondents represented Central California, defined as the Central Valley, Central Coast, and Gold Country.

**Potential population.** When enacted, the SSSP enhanced the state's Matriculation Program and encompassed assessment testing, orientation, and initial academic advising (SSSP Handbook, 2014). The CCC State Chancellor's Office reported that 290.7 faculty, management, and classified staff employees were responsible for matriculation and student assessment activities statewide in Fall 2013 (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2013), which was the most recent employee data available at the time of the study. The number of employees directly or indirectly responsible for SSSP implementation was not available. In
addition to those responsible for matriculation and assessment, other employees may have performed student success-related functions as part of their job responsibilities, such as some academic counselors who facilitate new student orientation or administrators with SSSP oversight responsibilities. These functions were not delineated in CCC staffing statistics. Therefore, it was not possible to determine the potential population of employees with student success-related responsibilities using data available at the time of the study.

However, as Jones (2002) explains, "questions about appropriate sample size have less to do with actual number of participants or cases and much more to do with the quality and depth of information elicited through the research process" (p. 465). Respondents in this study represented all three CCC overarching employee categories (i.e. management, faculty, staff) and held the full range of roles related to student success programming. They also hailed from a variety of campuses across California in terms of size, region, and student populations served. In these ways, the study participants were able to provide a view of the topic from multiple perspectives (Stake, 1995).
### Table 1. Participant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Participant Intake Form Responses N=35</th>
<th>Interview Participants N=11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female (22) 62.86% Male (12) 34.29% Unknown (1) 2.86%</td>
<td>Female (6) 45.5% Male (5) 54.5% Unknown (0) 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity</td>
<td>Native American or Alaska Native (0) 0% Asian, Pacific Islander, or Filipino (3) 8.57% Black or African American (2) 5.71% Hispanic or Latino (7) 20% White or Caucasian (19) 54.29% Two or More Races (1) 2.86% Unknown 8.57% (3)</td>
<td>Native American or Alaska Native (0) 0% Asian, Pacific Islander, or Filipino (1) 9.09% Black or African American (1) 9.09% Hispanic or Latino (1) 9.09% White or Caucasian (6) 54.55% Two or More Races (1) 9.09% Unknown 2.86% (1) 9.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job type</td>
<td>Classified staff (9) 25.71% Management (23) 65.71% Faculty (3) 8.57%</td>
<td>Classified staff (4) 36.36% Management (5) 45.46% Faculty (2) 18.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest completed educational level</td>
<td>Career/technical certificate (1) 2.86% Associate's degree (1) 2.86% Bachelor's degree (1) 2.86% Master's degree (19) 54.28% Doctoral degree (12) 34.28% Other (1) 2.86%</td>
<td>Career/technical certificate (0) 0% Associate's degree (0) 0% Bachelor's degree (1) 9.09% Master's degree (6) 54.55% Doctoral degree (3) 27.27% Other (1) 9.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience working in the CCC system</td>
<td>0-5 years (7) 20% 6-10 years (12) 34.28% 11-15 years (8) 22.86% 16-20 years (4) 11.43% 21 years or more (4) 11.43%</td>
<td>0-5 years (4) 36.36% 6-10 years (4) 36.36% 11-15 years (1) 9.1% 16-20 years (2) 18.18% 21 years or more (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>North (17) 48.57% Central (6) 17.14% South (12) 34.29%</td>
<td>North (5) 45.5% Central (2) 18.2% South (4) 36.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Qualitative researchers are obligated to identify and minimize any potential harm to their study participants, and one way to accomplish this is through adherence to institutional-based research procedures (Magolda & Weems, 2002). Accordingly, the researcher and faculty advisor obtained approval from the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct
the study (Appendix F). All IRB policies and procedures were followed diligently throughout the research process. Prior to beginning the study, the student researcher completed the online *Protecting Human Research Participant Training* course provided by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research and the certificate of completion was placed on file with the IRB.

Although it was expected that there would be little to no risk of harm in participating in this study, it was still important to reflect on ethical considerations in working directly with participants (Magolda & Weems, 2002). Creswell (2013) describes a number of ways researchers can address such ethical issues before, during, and after data collection (pp. 58-59). First, the purpose of the study was clearly explained to potential volunteers so that they understood the research goals. Next, participants were informed of their right to not answer any interview questions as well as their right to terminate participation at any time during the study. Known as informed consent, this process also helped participants understand how the information they provided was to be utilized in the research process (Magolda & Weems, 2002). Finally, participants' identities remained confidential throughout the study and in the final report.

**Data Collection**

Yin (2014) stipulates that multiple forms of data must be collected and analyzed in order to conduct a well-researched case study. He describes six forms of data that are relevant in case studies: interviews, direct observation, participant observation, archival records, documents, and physical artifacts (p. 85). Stake (1995) further suggests that researchers should select data sources "that best help us understand the case" (p. 56). This study utilized three primary forms of data: documents, qualitative responses from intake forms, and interviews.
Documents

Merriam (2009b) states that documents provide a rich source of background data for qualitative researchers, and suggests "documents include just about anything in existence prior to the research at hand .... [such as] letters, newspaper accounts, corporate records, documents, [and] historical accounts" (pp. 139-140).

For this study, documents related to student success and completion initiatives were reviewed to help the researcher strengthen her understanding of the Student Success and Support Program and new responsibilities assigned to student services departments. Documents included text of state legislation and CCC system mandates as well as agendas and training materials from meetings and workshops provided by the State Chancellor's Office and other California-based organizations. Student success plans from campuses represented by the interview participants were also reviewed to shed light on the types of programs participants were responsible for implementing. Further, a summary of the job responsibilities and previous work experiences of each participant helped the researcher learn about current and past experiences related to increasing student success. Appendix D provides a list of documents that were analyzed during the study.

Participant Intake Form

In addition to demographic questions utilized for participant recruitment, the Participant Intake Form (Appendix B) included open-ended questions related to respondents' experiences with student success learning and training activities. This allowed the researcher to collect qualitative data through the participant's typed responses. As Creswell (2012) explains, qualitative researchers may "gather open-ended responses to an electronic questionnaire" (p. 213) in order to identify themes and issues related to the research problem. Open-ended
questions can also be used to gather information and opinions from people whose knowledge may help the researcher gain an understanding of the topic under investigation (Chasteauneuf, 2010).

These questions were based on the theoretical framework, literature in student affairs professional development, and documents related to SSSP requirements. The form was created using the web-based data collection tool SurveyMonkey. Utilization of an electronic data-gathering tool allowed the researcher to solicit participation from practitioners who were geographically dispersed across California (Chasteauneuf, 2010; Creswell, 2012).

**Interviews**

The case study included in-depth interviews with 11 CCC employees responsible for implementing SSSP components. Qualitative research typically involves interviews of participants in order to gain insight into an issue directly from people experiencing the phenomenon, and this method is considered an important technique for collecting information in case studies (Merriam, 2009b; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). For this study, one semi-structured interview lasting 45 to 60 minutes was conducted with each participant. The use of semi-structured interviews ensured that a set list of questions would be asked of all participants, but allowed flexibility for the researcher to ask additional questions throughout each interview in order to explore vague or unique responses (Creswell, 2012, 2013; Merriam, 2009b; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Creswell (2012) suggests that researchers develop as few as five open-ended questions to "allow participants maximum flexibility for responding" (p. 225). However, he also acknowledges that the researcher may choose to ask additional questions in order to foster a deeper discussion. The first question should be a general question that serves as an introduction
or icebreaker (Creswell, 2012). Following these suggestions, the open-ended interview protocol (Appendix C) for this study included one grand tour introductory question, followed by seven questions directly related to the central research questions and informed by the theoretical framework.

Interviews were conducted by telephone between June and August 2015. Due to the size of California, telephone interviewing allowed the study to include participants throughout the state (Chasteauneuf, 2010). Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) find that there are no significant differences between results from telephone and face-to-face interviews. With the participants' permission, interviews were audio recorded utilizing a smart phone application designed for recording telephone calls.

Interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), the interviewer must verify the accuracy of all transcripts, since the person providing transcription is unlikely to be familiar with the topic or language used in the field (p. 191). In this study, participants used acronyms and terminology specifically related to the SSSP and the CCC system. Therefore, the researcher also verified each transcript by listening to the audio recording several times while reading the transcription and making any necessary changes. At this stage, the researcher also made note of participants' tone or inflection when relevant, such as when the participant became enthusiastic or hesitated while answering a question (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Participants were then provided with a copy of their transcripts for review and editing if needed (Creswell, 2012). One participant requested transcript edits to clarify the name of a committee that had been transcribed incorrectly.

**Data Analysis**

As Creswell (2012) explains, "there is no single, accepted approach to analyzing
Rather, researchers have a variety of tools and methods available to help organize and make sense of the data collected. Nonetheless, Creswell (2012) describes six steps for analyzing qualitative data that provide clarity in developing a data analysis plan: (1) prepare and organize data; (2) assign initial codes; (3) develop themes; (4) use visuals or narratives to demonstrate initial findings; (5) review literature and theory to help interpret findings; and (6) validate findings (p. 237).

Further, Miles and Huberman (1994) describe a multi-phase inductive analysis process focused on data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Following these guidelines, data were first collected through intake forms, legislative and training documents, and participant interviews as previously described. Data were then organized and coded through the multi-step, iterative process informed by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Creswell (2012) as described next. Table 2 then provides a summary of the data analysis process.

**Phase 1: Data Reduction**

After data is collected, Miles & Huberman's (1994) data reduction phase helps researchers identify information most relevant to the study's purpose and research questions. Coupled with guidance provided by Stake (1995, 2013) regarding effective case study analysis, the researcher split this phase into two steps: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis.

**Within-case analysis.** In the initial step of data analysis, a within-case analysis of each participant was completed. All data related to an individual participant were reviewed, including the interview transcript, intake form responses, and documents. To analyze the data, two cycles of reduction took place. First, each data source was read thoroughly several times, noting specific words or phrases used by the participant, also known as in vivo codes (Saldaña, 2013).
Responses were labeled manually using the built-in highlighters in Word and Adobe Acrobat PDF Reader. Next, a list of all identified code words related to practitioner learning was generated (Creswell, 2012) by copying and pasting the code words into an Excel spreadsheet. These initial text segments were examined for redundancy or overlapping concepts related to the research questions, and then similar labels were condensed.

Creswell (2012) suggests a "lean coding" (p. 244) approach since a final report that provides rich and "detailed information about a few themes is more useful than a report that provides general information about many themes" (p. 245). Using this approach, a small number of labels were assigned to text segments to ensure that no more than 10-15 final labels were assigned within one case (Creswell, 2012). During this phase, peer coders were also utilized to check that the researcher's final coding of individual transcripts accurately reflected the participant's statements (Creswell, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Across all 11 participants, a total of 87 codes were assigned during this step.

**Cross-case analysis.** In Step 2, a cross-case analysis was completed by comparing labels among participants (Stake, 2013). Labels from within-case analyses were entered into a new Excel spreadsheet, which was first sorted alphabetically to highlight and reduce obvious redundancies among participants.

Following Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggestions, these common in vivo labels were then transitioned to descriptive codes in order to interpret and summarize the participants' responses (p. 57). For example, participants listed by name many different meetings they attended in order to learn about student success and SSSP requirements. Rather than continuing to use the in vivo labels such as "Chief Student Services Officers Meeting" or "weekly staff meetings," these labels were collapsed into the code "meetings" (see Appendix E for examples of
label and category compression). The transcripts and intake forms were then reviewed to ensure that the resulting new descriptive codes still reflected the meaning of the participants' statements in relation to the topic (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process reduced the 87 initial in vivo labels to 39 common descriptive codes.

At this stage, visual representations of the emerging categories and themes, also known as data display (Miles & Huberman, 1994), were created by compiling separate worksheets in one Excel workbook to help the researcher organize, view, and track the data reduction process. Next, patterns and shared themes were identified by searching for overlap and then similar codes were compressed (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Stake, 2013). This reduced the common codes from 39 to 17.

Again, Creswell (2012) emphasizes that it is ideal to highlight a small number of common themes in order to develop an in-depth analysis. Therefore, compression of labels continued until saturation was reached; that is, "until the most crucial and the essential questions of the study [were] answered" (Aaltio & Heilmann, 2010, p. 69). Coding worksheets, transcripts, intake forms, and documents were continually reviewed to ensure that these themes were present for all participants (Stake, 2013). Ongoing compression resulted in the development of nine primary themes about practitioner learning.

**Phase 2: Drawing and Verifying Conclusions**

The final stage of data analysis described by Miles and Huberman (1994) involves drawing conclusions from the data and verifying the accuracy of those findings. This phase was broken into two separate steps to ensure that the research questions were thoroughly examined (Creswell, 2012).

**Drawing conclusions.** Miles et al. (2014) suggest that in order to generate meaning from
the data, researchers should pay attention to emerging patterns and themes "that pull together many separate pieces of data. Something jumps out at you and suddenly makes sense" (p. 277). This process of searching for patterns and themes took place throughout the iterative coding and reduction processes, as the researcher first noted general commonalities among participants and then considered these shared themes in relation to the research questions and goals of the study (Stake, 1995).

Using Miles et al.'s (2014) concept of clustering, the nine emerging themes were then grouped under four overarching categories in order to organize concepts by the aspects of learning that they represented. The categories and themes were then compared against the theoretical framework to help make meaning of the thematic results in relation to the research questions (Creswell, 2012; Miles et al., 2014). This process resulted in the development of four key findings related to practitioner learning about student success. Findings were then compared to the relevant literature (Creswell, 2012) in order understand how they aligned with existing research in student affairs. This stage also highlighted where new knowledge was generated and assisted the researcher in identifying implications for theory, research, and practice based on the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 2009b).

**Verifying conclusions.** In order to validate findings, data triangulation took place during Step 4 of data analysis by comparing the categories, themes, and conclusions with case documents and intake forms from all 35 respondents. Triangulation is a process that researchers employ to ensure that findings and conclusions are grounded in sufficient data (Creswell, 2012, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles et al., 2014). Evidence was corroborated both within and across each data collection method (e.g. interviews, intake forms, documents). First, a theme needed to emerge from interviews, intake forms, and documents to be validated within that data
method (Creswell, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 2013). A finding was then confirmed if there were at least two separate sources of evidentiary support (Yin, 2003; Merriam, 2009b; Stake, 1995).

Lastly, peer debriefing occurred through conversations with three of the researcher's student services colleagues to discuss the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice in relation to the community college setting, employee learning, and student success. Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that peer debriefing "keeps the inquirer 'honest' ... by an experienced protagonist doing his or her best to play the devil's advocate" (p. 308). Accordingly, the probing questions and suggestions provided by the peer debriefers helped the researcher confront any preconceived ideas or biases (Butin, 2010; Creswell, 2012). This process also helped test the conclusions to confirm that they were plausible and beneficial to the field (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Table 2. Overview of Data Analysis Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase/Step</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1: Data Reduction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Within-case analyses</td>
<td>All data related to an individual participant (interview transcript, intake form responses, documents) reviewed; in vivo labels developed</td>
<td>All materials manually coded using Word and Adobe highlighters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>List of all identified code words related to practitioner learning generated</td>
<td>Excel spreadsheet for each participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Text segments examined for redundancy; overlapping concepts condensed</td>
<td>87 labels across 11 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Cross-case analysis</td>
<td>Labels from within-case analyses compiled into one document</td>
<td>Excel spreadsheet of all participant labels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spreadsheet sorted alphabetically; highlighted obvious redundancies among participants</td>
<td>87 labels reduced to 39 common codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data display of emerging categories and themes created to organize, view, and track continued data reduction process</td>
<td>Comprehensive Excel workbook containing 12 separate spreadsheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In vivo labels transitioned to descriptive codes to summarize/interpret participants' responses</td>
<td>39 common codes compressed into 17 codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patterns and shared themes identified by searching for overlap; similar codes compressed</td>
<td>17 codes reduced to 9 primary themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 2: Drawing and Verifying Conclusions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Draw Conclusions</td>
<td>Theory reviewed; organized concepts by the aspects of learning that they represented</td>
<td>Themes clustered under four overarching categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Categories and themes compared against theoretical framework; reviewed thematic results in relation to research questions</td>
<td>Four key findings related to practitioner learning discovered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literature reviewed; searched for alignment with student affairs research; identified where new knowledge was generated</td>
<td>Developed implications for theory, research, and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4: Verify Conclusions</td>
<td>Data triangulation; compared categories, themes, conclusions with all case documents and intake forms from all 35 respondents</td>
<td>Each themes and conclusion verified by at least two separate data sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer debriefing with student services colleagues</td>
<td>Confirmed plausibility and benefit of findings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Storage and Participant Confidentiality**

**Storage**

Creswell (2012) posits that new researchers may not be prepared for the large volume of data collected during a qualitative study. For this reason, researchers should develop a plan for recording, organizing, and storing data. Yin (2003) states that researchers conducting a case
study should create a central case study database to store notes, tabular materials, documents, and narratives (p. 102-103). In accordance with these suggestions, all materials, including notes, documents, interview audio files, and transcripts were saved in an electronic case study database created for this project. Mann and Stewart (2000) emphasize that researchers must ensure the secure storage of electronic data containing information about participants (p. 57). Therefore, the case study database was stored both in a password-protected, cloud-based storage system and on a password-protected computer kept in the researcher's home office (Creswell, 2012).

A back-up of this data was stored on a password-protected external drive kept in a locked filing cabinet only accessible to the student researcher. Participant Intake Form responses were stored in the researcher's online SurveyMonkey account, which was password protected, and a PDF of the data was downloaded and stored in the case study database. Physical materials, such as field notes, were scanned and saved as PDF files in the case study database, then stored in the locked filing cabinet to ensure that no unauthorized persons had access to the data (Mann & Stewart, 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality is important in qualitative research for a number of reasons. Because participants in qualitative research are often asked to share personal information about their experiences, beliefs, and values, offering confidentiality is a way to provide a safe space for participants to share their true opinions and feelings (Merriam, 2009b). This can lead to rich information that adds tremendous value to the research (Creswell, 2012). Utilizing pseudonyms and removing other personally identifiable information are typical ways that researchers are able to provide anonymity and strengthen confidentiality (Creswell, 2012; Magolda & Weems, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).
In line with these suggestions, responses to the Participant Intake Form were kept anonymous. Utilizing the options available within SurveyMonkey, the researcher chose not to collect the internet protocol (IP) address of respondents. This meant that responses could not be traced to campus internet domains and individual users, thus providing an additional method to ensure anonymity of intake form respondents (Mann & Stewart, 2000). Interview participants were assigned pseudonyms and identities were known only to the researcher. Although direct quotations from participants were included in the thesis, quotes were attributed to the assigned pseudonyms of the participants rather than their real names. Additionally, personally identifiable information such as specific job titles and names of colleges were not included in the final report. Only limited information was shared about campuses, such as community characteristic (e.g. urban, suburban, or rural), which further protected the identity of participants.

**Trustworthiness**

Pilot testing, member checking, data triangulation, and peer debriefing were completed to ensure trustworthiness of the study. First, both the intake form and interview protocol were piloted with student services practitioners who were not participating in the study. This provided an opportunity for the researcher to make changes to the questions utilizing participant feedback before employing these methods in the field (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). After formal interviews were completed, member checking occurred by sending the transcripts to each participant for review and correction if necessary (Creswell, 2012, 2013). Once final themes and conclusions were identified, peer debriefing with community college student services practitioners tested the credibility of findings (Creswell, 2012). Throughout the study, the researcher's experiences were also continually examined in order to identify and confront assumptions (Butin, 2010).
Reliability

Reliability, also called confirmability, refers to the extent to which a study's findings could be replicated by another researcher (Merriam, 2009b; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles & Huberman (1994) suggest that potential repeatability is enhanced when the researcher provides an overview of the philosophical assumptions and theoretical framework of the study. This is further strengthened through the inclusion of a detailed description of the research design and an explanation of data collection and analysis methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278). Accordingly, a detailed description of the methodology was described in this chapter. Reliability was also enhanced through audio recording of interviews and use of an external transcriptionist to transcribe interviews verbatim. The use of peer coders and debriefing with experts in student services also increased the reliability of the study (Creswell, 2012).

Finally, the researcher maintained a "chain of evidence" (Yin, 2003, p. 105) that described how codes were generated and conclusions were drawn. This increased the reliability of the study, since "in principle, other investigators can review the evidence directly and not be limited to the written case study report" (Yin, 2003, p. 102). Following these guidelines, all data, memos, and notes related to the study's findings were stored in a case study database, which clearly identified sources of evidence for conclusions drawn by the researcher.

Validity

Internal validity. Internal validity refers to the authenticity or credibility of the study's findings, or as Miles and Huberman (1994) question, "do the findings of the study make sense?" (p. 278). To mitigate potential threats to internal validity, this study utilized multiple data collection methods (Yin, 2003, 2014). Data triangulation allowed for a deep analysis of the issue and the confirmation of conclusions drawn through several pieces of evidence (Merriam, 2009b).
Member checking was also employed in order to provide participants with an opportunity to review transcripts and ensure that that their voices had been accurately captured. Finally, the written report of findings in Chapter 4 provided a rich description of practitioner learning by using direct quotes from participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This allows readers to develop their own understanding of the issue through the words of practitioners (Creswell, 2012).

**External validity.** External validity refers to the extent to which the study's findings can be generalized (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Yin (2003) concludes that case studies can be "generalizable to theoretical propositions and not entire populations or universes" (p. 10). This goal of "analytic generalization" (Yin, 2003, p. 10) aligns with the aim of an instrumental case study; that is, to shed light on an overall phenomenon in a way that could be applicable to similar situations or settings (Baxter & Jack, 2008). As such, the study provided insight on learning among community college student services practitioners working to improve student success.

Generalizability was enhanced by the recruitment of multiple practitioners with varied roles and responsibilities through maximal variation sampling (Flyvbjerg, 2006). However, these findings may be applicable to student services practitioners responsible for student success initiatives, or just to those employed at community colleges, but are unlikely to represent learning among student services practitioners at all types of institutions.

**Role of Researcher**

Since scholar-practitioners analyze contemporary problems within their own practice, they bring assumptions and opinions about these issues into the research process (Butin, 2010; Machi & McEvoy, 2012). In order to address potential biases, researchers must examine their assumptions and remember that their experiences may not reflect those of participants. To inject opinions into the study may prevent researchers from authentically reporting the perspectives and
experiences of their participants (Briscoe, 2005; Creswell, 2012).

However, since qualitative research is also reliant upon the researcher as an instrument in data collection and analysis, the researcher's professional background informed the study's methodology and interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2012). As Iacono et al. (2009) suggest, the researcher serves as a "reflective practitioner" (p. 39), bringing knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon or the context, and this provides a powerful tool for exploration. Thus, the researcher's experience as a student services practitioner in California was considered important in designing and implementing the study. Further, the researcher's assumption that student success can be positively impacted by committed and well-prepared student services practitioners underpinned the study.

In order to minimize potential biases resulting from these experiences and assumptions, the researcher first reflected on her motivations to undertake this research (Butin, 2010; Machi & McEvoy, 2012). By then articulating possible biases and actively soliciting feedback from professional peers and research supervisors, she sought to ensure that her personal opinions did not improperly influence the study's results and conclusions (Briscoe, 2005).

**Summary of Methodology**

As described, this qualitative study employed an instrumental case study design. The goal of this research was to shed light on the nature of learning among community college student services practitioners responsible for student success initiatives. Specifically, the study focused on community college employees implementing the Student Success and Support Program as part of California's Student Success Act of 2012.

The study was framed by the view of adult learning known as andragogy (Knowles 1974, 1980, 1990; 1995; Knowles et al., 1998, 2015). Two research questions guided this study: (1)
How do community college student services practitioners in California learn about issues related to student success? and (2) Why do community college student services practitioners in California participate in learning related to student success?

Following the guidelines for effective qualitative research in general, and case study research in particular, the study was conducted by collecting and analyzing multiple forms of data, including documents, intake forms, and interviews of individuals experiencing the problem. Utilizing suggestions for data analysis and reduction offered by Creswell (2012), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Stake (1995, 2013), data were then coded to identify themes related to the research questions and the study's purpose, resulting in the identification of nine final themes organized within four categories. This allowed the researcher to identify the most central themes relevant to the nature of learning among practitioners. Appropriate steps were taken to protect participants from any potential harm and to ensure trustworthiness of the findings. Results from data analysis are provided next in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4: REPORT OF THE FINDINGS

This chapter provides a report of the findings, beginning with a description of the study context. An overview of the data collection and analysis process is then provided, followed by descriptions of the participants. Next is a review of the emerging themes and concepts. An analysis of the research questions is then presented, followed by a description of how the themes were validated. The chapter concludes with a summary of key findings.

Study Context

The study took place within the California Community Colleges (CCC), a 113-campus system of public, two-year colleges that educates two million students each year (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2015). California was selected to illustrate the phenomenon under investigation because the system was in the process of implementing a statewide initiative known as the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP) at all community colleges. Chapter 2 included information about the growth of student success initiatives across the nation and the CCC system's renewed focus on student progress and completion. This section provides information about the SSSP related to the roles and functions carried out by student services practitioners, such as those involved in this study.

California Senate Bill 1456, also referred to as the Student Success Act of 2012, contained a variety of student persistence and completion policies aimed at increasing graduation and transfer rates within the community college system. Scheduled to be implemented by the 2017-18 academic year, the initiative mandated changes to student enrollment, financial aid, and support services (Taylor, 2014).

The legislation emphasized retention, persistence, degree completion, and transfer as indicators of student success and enhanced student pre-enrollment requirements, renaming the
state's existing Matriculation Program to the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP). As part of the SSSP, incoming CCC students were required to participate in a series of intake and advising support services: assessment, or placement testing, in math and English with a statewide placement instrument; orientation and counseling; development of a two-semester education plan; development of a comprehensive educational plan; and additional advising services for at-risk students (SSSP Handbook, 2014, p. 2.1).

Beyond these "core services" (SSSP Handbook, 2014, p. 2.1), the SSSP also included significant administrative requirements such as program development, research, and budget management. Implementation responsibilities fell mainly to student services personnel at the individual campuses (Yamagata-Noji, n.d). While colleges were free to assign various student success responsibilities to existing staff, counseling faculty, and administrators, each campus was also required to designate an SSSP coordinator to assume overall responsibility for the program.

The Student Success Act of 2012 also required the development of a Student Success Scorecard listing each college's student persistence, retention, and six-year completion rates to be publicly posted on the college and State Chancellor's Office websites. In order to receive ongoing SSSP funding, colleges were required to participate in all aspects of the SSSP, complete an annual program plan and summary report, and provide data for the Student Success Scorecard (CCC Chancellor's Office, 2012).

**Summary of Data Collection and Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of learning among community college student services practitioners. Two research questions guided the study: (1) How do community college student services practitioners in California learn about issues related to student success? and (2) Why do community college student services practitioners in California participate in
An instrumental case study was conducted to explore the phenomenon. Following guidelines for effective qualitative case study research, the study was conducted by collecting and analyzing multiple forms of data, including legislative and training documents, qualitative responses from intake forms, and interviews of individuals who were directly experiencing the problem (Merriam, 2009b; Stake, 1995). Data were then examined and coded utilizing a four step data analysis process informed by procedures described by Miles and Huberman (1994), Creswell (2012), and Stake (1995, 2013), as outlined in Chapter 3. Table 3 provides a summary of data analysis methods utilized to develop and verify overarching themes and conclusions.

Table 3. Summary of Data Analysis Methods

| Step 1 – Within-case analysis of each participant |
| In vivo coding (Saldana, 2013) and lean coding (Creswell, 2012) to develop initial themes within each case |

| Step 2 – Cross-case analysis of all participants |
| Compare themes across cases, compress categories, and develop major themes (Stake 1995, 2013) |

| Step 3 – Draw Conclusions |
| Compare themes to literature and theory, return to data to develop conclusions (Creswell, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994) |

| Step 4 - Verify Conclusions |
| Review intake forms, documents, and transcripts to validate each finding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) |

**Study Participants**

Participants in this study were employees at California Community Colleges (CCC) who had responsibilities for coordinating components of the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP) at their campuses. Thirty-five practitioners completed an online intake form and 11 of those respondents completed in-depth interviews. Chapter 3 provided a description of all intake
form respondents. This section provides an introduction to the 11 interview participants, utilizing pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. An overview of participant backgrounds is provided first, followed by a narrative description of each participant. Table 2 then provides a brief summary of participant characteristics.

**Overview of Participants**

**Demographics.** Of the 11 interview participants, six identified as female and five identified as male. Six participants described their race or ethnicity as White or Caucasian; one as Asian, Pacific Islander, or Filipino; one as Black or African American; one as Hispanic or Latino; one as Two or More Races (White and Hispanic); and one declined to self-identify. No participants identified as Native American or Alaskan Native.

**Areas of responsibility.** Five administrators, four classified staff, and two faculty members participated in interviews. Their responsibilities included multiple areas related to the SSSP: seven respondents indicated that they were responsible for related support services such as student outreach, enrollment, or financial aid; six were responsible for follow-up services for at-risk students; six for budget management; six for orientation; five for overall coordination of the SSSP at their campuses; five for research related to student success and matriculation; four for developing and administering related policies; three for assessment; and two for student education plans. Note that because each participant may have had multiple SSSP related responsibilities, the total exceeds the number of participants.

**Experience and highest education levels.** Participants had between two and 19 years of experience working within the CCC system. The majority of participants held a graduate degree as their highest completed education level. Six participants had a master's degree, three had a doctorate, and one participant had a post-master's graduate certificate. One participant earned a
bachelor's degree.

**Participant Profiles**

**Aaron.** As the Chief Student Services Officer (CSSO) at a large suburban community college, Aaron was responsible for overseeing all aspects of student services at his campus. These responsibilities included overall direction for the SSSP, including planning, reporting, and budget management. He was also responsible for financial aid and enrollment services. Aaron previously served as a faculty member and head of the counseling department at the same community college. In these roles, he was directly responsible for assessment, educational planning, and orientation components of the SSSP.

**Brian.** Brian served as the Chief Instructional Officer (CIO) and interim CSSO at a small rural community college. Since this interim assignment coincided with the beginning of SSSP implementation, he was responsible for campus-wide oversight of the program in addition to providing direction for all instructional and student services units on campus. Brian previously served in academic leadership positions at a nearby community college as well as at a college in another state.

**Carolyn.** Before accepting her current role as a counseling faculty member at a mid-sized urban community college, Carolyn served as a staff member at a neighboring campus. She recently celebrated her one-year anniversary in the counselor position. During this time, she was busy teaching orientation courses and assisting students with creating education plans as part of the SSSP. She had also previously worked as an adjunct counselor in the CCC system, and had experience working at four-year institutions in advising roles.

**Diane.** Diane served as an assistant in the counseling office, where she collaborated with counselors to provide guidance for students exploring careers and majors. She was previously a
staff member in the enrollment department at the same large suburban college. In that role, she helped students schedule appointments for placement testing, administered tests, and assisted with new student recruitment at local high schools. Her six years of employment at this college served as Diane's only experience working in higher education.

**Evan.** Evan had worked as a classified staff member in various roles in the admissions department of his mid-sized suburban campus for almost 10 years. This experience included assisting students with applications for admission, making appointments for placement testing, signing up for orientation sessions, and registering for classes. He also helped students make tuition payments and manage their online accounts. Evan had attended the same community college as a student before transferring to a four-year institution.

**Gina.** For over a year, Gina had served in a newly created position on her campus as the program manager for student success. She was directly responsible for management of the SSSP and ensuring that her mid-sized suburban college complied with planning, reporting, and budgetary requirements of the program. As part of this role, she also led a campus committee of staff, faculty, and administrators charged with developing overarching objectives for student success. Gina had worked in higher education for nearly 18 years as support staff in instruction and student services programs.

**Lily.** Lily was a counseling faculty member at a small rural community college, where she provided comprehensive academic advising, education planning, and career guidance in a program geared to low-income returning adult students with families. Prior to being hired as a full-time counselor last year, she served as a part-time counselor at the same college. Lily also previously worked with disadvantaged students a four-year university in California prior to moving into the community college system. She had attended a community college as a student
before completing her bachelor's and master's degrees.

**Kevin.** As the CSSO at his mid-sized suburban college, Kevin was responsible for overseeing all aspects of student services, including enrollment, financial aid, student activities, counseling, and services for disadvantaged students. This also included SSSP oversight. Prior to moving into this role, he served in a student services leadership role at a neighboring community college. He had over 10 years of experience directly serving at-risk students in federal student support programs, and almost 20 years of experience working in community colleges overall.

**Michael.** As a relative newcomer to the CCC system, Michael joined his small suburban campus just as California was beginning to implement the SSSP program. He had served as the CSSO for just under three years, and also served as CIO for the past year. He was responsible for all student learning and support services on his campus, including SSSP oversight. Michael had a wide range of student services experiences from both private and public institutions in another state. He was also involved in national student affairs professional associations.

**Natasha.** Natasha had the least experience working with community college students compared to the other interview participants. For two years she had served in a newly created role that included coordinating administrative and budget aspects of student success and student services programs at her large urban campus. She also assisted with student orientation sessions and taught a class at her campus as an adjunct instructor. Additionally, she had over 15 years of experience working in various student support roles at four-year institutions in multiple states.

**Vicky.** With 20 years of employment at her institution, Vicky had more experience working in the CCC system than any of the other interview participants. In her role as a coordinator for assessment services, she was responsible for placement testing components of the SSSP. Vicky was actively involved with campus and district committees related to
matriculation, as well as statewide task forces and planning groups related to assessment testing and course placement. Previously, Vicky had held a variety of student services roles at her large suburban campus.

Table 4. Summary of Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>CCC Job Classification</th>
<th>Primary SSSP Responsibilities</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Years Employed in CCC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Overall coordination of SSSP; related support services; budget management</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>11-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Overall coordination of SSSP; related research; budget management; related support services</td>
<td>Post-master's graduate certificate</td>
<td>0-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Orientation; education planning</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>6-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Assessment; orientation; related support services</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>6-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evan</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Enrollment support; orientation</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>5-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Overall coordination of SSSP; budget management</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>6-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Overall coordination of SSSP; related support services; budget management</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>16-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Orientation; education planning; follow-up for at risk students</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>0-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Overall coordination of SSSP; related support services; budget management</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>0-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Budget management; administering related policies; orientation</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>0-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicky</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Assessment; orientation</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>16-20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emergent Concepts and Categories

Data analysis of intake forms, interviews, and documents revealed nine themes organized under four categories related to practitioner learning. Major concepts emerged related to experience, professional development, learning with others, and influences on learning. As the goal of the study was to illuminate the experiences of community college student services practitioners, the following section explores the emergent concepts by highlighting relevant information provided by participants.

Experience

Current responsibilities. Practitioners increased their understanding about student success through performing daily tasks and responsibilities related to supporting students. The major driver for practitioners to increase their knowledge regarding student success was the assignment of new responsibilities and tasks. In some instances, these tasks were related to the practitioner assuming a new job. New roles and expectations served as both a reason for learning and a means of learning.

For instance, since the SSSP required that campuses designate an SSSP coordinator to manage all aspects of the plan, some campuses created new positions responsible for program oversight. Gina had recently taken on the new SSSP management role for her campus and this new position prompted her to spend a great deal of time thinking about what she needed to learn in order to run a successful program. She remarked that for “the first week or so [on the job], all I did was read, read, read, and read!” However, it was the "day-to-day" experiences with students that taught her the most about student success barriers and challenges.

Diane’s new role as an assistant in her college's counseling department also required an increased understanding of student success strategies. She believed that her job continually
provided opportunities to learn strategies and tools to help students succeed in entering a career or transferring. As she commented, "I don't think I'm an expert in the area, but I definitely think I've gained a lot of knowledge in the last year."

For others, these responsibilities were added or increased within jobs they already held. Brian assumed new responsibilities overseeing the SSSP and all student services in an interim capacity due to a vacancy in student services leadership on his campus. In this assignment, he led efforts to review all programs and surveyed students to discover issues that his campus needed to address in order to improve retention.

**Prior positions.** All interviewees identified their previous experiences working with and supporting students as vital resources in preparing for their current roles. This prior experience served as a foundation for new learning about barriers and tools related to student success. Participants assessed the skills and competencies gained in past positions to help them identify what they already knew and what they needed to learn.

For example, Aaron expressed that his previous experience as a faculty member and as a leader in student services helped him become aware of the academic and personal challenges that students on his campus faced in achieving their goals. This provided foundational understanding of community college retention and persistence issues and prepared him to later take on additional responsibilities managing the SSSP as an executive administrator.

Carolyn and Lily utilized their past experiences as adjunct counselors to inform their current responsibilities as full-time counseling faculty members. In their adjunct roles, they provided general counseling and facilitated orientation, responsibilities that expanded in their tenure-track positions. Additionally, in Carolyn's former classified staff role, she assumed increased responsibilities related to advising due to budget cuts and department consolidations.
This challenge served as a learning opportunity, as Carolyn remarked that her learning curve in the new counselor position "would have been steeper" without that experience.

Diane's knowledge of student success gained from her previous position continued to benefit students on her campus. When asked how she knew that she had a firm grasp on student success components, she replied:

I think it's just the ease at which I'm able to answer questions. So even though I've been out of the role ... for a year, knowledge is still there. Even though I try to forget it [laughs], it never really goes away! You know, when a student comes in and asks me assessment questions, or about orientation or registration, or anything about the beginning steps of the enrollment process, I've retained that knowledge from the years that I worked in the other office. So students can [still] come in and ask me questions.

Several participants noted that the sum of their prior experiences, rather than one single position, prepared them to take on deeper roles related to increasing student success. For example, Kevin stated:

I've been fortunate in that my whole professional career has been working with and supporting student equity programs. And they've been well structured in that they were founded and based in theory and best practice on how students successfully navigate a system of higher education.

Evan, Carolyn, and Michael also noted that their understanding of student success had been developed and refined throughout their entire careers. Natasha emphasized that she drew from her previous experiences to help identify what else she might need to learn. "I have a lot of experience in student affairs, so maybe it's the latest [emphasis hers] definition of what we're calling student success and persistence that gives me a cue that I need to learn more," she explained.

**Professional Development and Training**

**Regional.** Participants identified a variety of workshops, conferences, and training programs that they attended in order to learn about student success issues. They indicated that
training provided by their colleges and districts, the State Chancellor's Office, and California-based organizations provided their primary opportunities to learn about both the SSSP guidelines specifically and student success in general.

Participants responsible for overall management of student success programs, such as Aaron, Gina, and Michael, participated in system-wide activities such as the annual two-day SSSP Directors Training. They also utilized California-based organizations and professional associations such as the Research and Planning (RP) Group for California Community Colleges, and the CCC Chief Student Services Administrators Association to learn about student success policies and best practices. Additionally, Carolyn, Vicky, Lily, and Diane highlighted the transfer success workshops sponsored by the University of California and California State University as well as position-specific workgroups and associations, such as the CCC Assessment Association and CCC Academic Senate.

For most participants, it was a "given" that they would choose workshops sponsored by state organizations, since their work specifically focused on student success in the context of the California legislation. Carolyn explained:

I prefer to go to regional meetings more than I prefer to go to even national conferences. There is definitely benefit from hearing from somebody that lives in, you know, North Carolina, about their community colleges but I can't call that person and ask them what they are doing about SSSP. So I find regional conferences to be much more beneficial.

The outliers in this area were Michael, Brian, and Natasha -- the only participants who had also worked in higher education outside of California -- who mentioned utilizing various resources from national organizations focused not only on the broader picture of student retention and completion, but also student development in general. They sought literature and materials from student affairs associations when trying to solve a challenge or were just generally interested in learning about a new topic. These practitioners were the exception,
however. The rest of the interviewees indicated that they mainly utilized regional resources to help broaden their understanding of student success.

**Relevant and task-specific.** When describing the most impactful or useful developmental experiences, participants stated that they learned best when activities were directed to the problems and issues faced by students on their particular campuses. Several participants devoted time to researching their student populations, which helped them understand more about how to support student success and remove barriers at their colleges. Brian remarked that learning happened when he focused on "understanding the students that we have in front of us and how to engage them, how to motivate them, how to complete. [It is] a self-evaluation of what kinds of hurdles we put in their way."

Participants also expressed a preference for training and learning that directly related to their current roles and responsibilities. For example, when asked if she was interested in learning about larger issues related to coordinating a student success program, such as student development theory or budget management, Diane explained:

> To me, anytime you receive more knowledge is great. But on a daily basis, if it will not help me help my students...then no, I don't think it's necessary for me to learn those things. I'd rather spend more time focusing on the day-to-day stuff and what I do with students.

Evan also preferred learning that was directly related to his everyday job responsibilities. He was concerned that many of the "workshops, training sessions, and conferences do not address the immediate issues or problem. I believe that addressing immediate issues is the most important aspect in [increasing] student success." However, Brian expressed a conflict between focusing on the specific aspects of the SSSP and being able to address the salient needs of his campus. He remarked that even though it was beneficial to attend training offered by the State Chancellor's Office,
the workshops, the conferences, statewide that I have been involved with have been much more at that bureaucratic level of policy implementation. How you write your plan, how you do your crosswalk, your general fund monies with your categorical money. It rarely talks about 'this is how you deal with the student in front of you to make them successful.'

With and From Others

Dialogue. All 11 participants stated that they learned about student success issues and methods from other practitioners, either on their own campuses or from other colleges. Practitioners commented that they learned from "talking to people" and "asking questions" to improve their understanding of student success. Conversations with colleagues served as one of the greatest sources of learning for these practitioners.

For example, Aaron stressed that interacting with colleagues in his college district had been invaluable to learning strategies and best practices for increasing student success. He relied on meetings and a district email listserv where student success managers and vice presidents shared ideas. He also benefited from activities that involved "bringing everyone in a room and having a dialogue, I really like that because it is important for our counselors, our student services folks, our instructional folks. We all need to work together."

Michael and Natasha also mentioned that talking with colleagues helped them "connect the dots" and see issues and challenges more clearly. Likewise, Lily stated that being able to "just walk down the hall" to talk to her colleagues and ask them for information or clarification about an issue was the most beneficial to her learning about student success.

Carolyn noted that having conversations with other counselors and student services practitioners was a primary motivation for attending conferences and workshops. She remarked:

I can't stand a conference packed front-to-back with workshops ... I gain more out of conferences the ability to meet people in those small sessions and get some information, [and] also to sit and talk to other people, ask questions, and work with others from other campuses. That to me is absolutely the best part of any conference.
Through interaction with CCC practitioners, participants also discovered best practices from other campuses that had made advances in student persistence and graduation rates, and this contributed to their learning. As Vicky put it, "I've always learned a lot from being with other people from other campuses and hearing their stories."

Finally, dialogue also took the form of information-sharing and communication with staff at the State Chancellor's Office as well as with campus leaders, both in person and via email. Several practitioners indicated that they relied on email communication from state organizations as well as their district administrators to stay informed about student success related topics. For example, Lily and Gina noted that they gained a great deal of information related to the SSSP from district, campus, and department communications.

**Problem solving.** Beyond ongoing dialogue and information-sharing, practitioners also stated that they learned through problem-solving opportunities that allowed them to address the immediate challenges they faced related to increasing student success. For instance, Aaron was interested in learning activities where people on his campus "come together and look at how we help students succeed, how we help them graduate, how we help them transfer." This allowed him to both learn about student success issues and tackle the challenges that his campus was facing in tandem.

Lily described learning about student success during professional development activities utilizing "vignettes" or "scenarios" about potential problems faced by students, and then working out "the road that the student needs to follow." Similarly, Natasha explained that when she attended workshops or meetings with activities such as "a case study or group discussion about an issue or problem, that's where I find the greatest kind of learning can happen for me."

Further, Carolyn enthusiastically described a time when she needed to informally problem-solve
with a colleague in order to begin developing a new counseling course for students:

I went into my colleague's office ... and I said, 'I just need to freak out for a second!' And she started asking me these very pointed questions and gave me this framework and she said, "How can I help you?" So ... I suddenly had this checklist -- things that I needed to do or needed to learn how to do. I don't know, I guess I seek people that have experience to help me walk through my process.

That idea of "walking through" a challenge with another colleague to find solutions was echoed by Evan, who stated that he "learned the most from resolving issues with my colleagues day-in and day-out." Additionally, Kevin noted that it was important "to set aside time ... to find solutions" with his team to tackle student achievement barriers.

**Influences on Learning**

**Personal commitment.** When asked what motivated them to learn about ways to increase student success and to improve their professional skills, all 11 interviewees expressed a desire to better serve students. They felt that their professional values, as well as their personal commitment to helping students, required them to continually develop their knowledge and competencies. Thus, they sought opportunities to learn new methods that helped increase student success. They used phrases like "obligation" and "the right thing to do" to describe why they needed to increase their abilities to support students. For example, Michael passionately described the values that drove his desire to continue learning:

If you're in this work because you care about students and you believe that higher education is still, despite the challenges we all face, a great equalizer -- if you believe that, then you can't just go about your business and clock in and clock out. You have to be looking at how you can do better. Graduation rates, completion rates, overall success rates, particularly amongst students of color ... It's obvious the work we need to do and the commitment we need to have.

As Michael articulated, commitment to students and was integral in promoting learning among practitioners. Similarly, Lily said, "ultimately, it's student success. Me wanting to be efficient and knowledgeable to help students achieve their goals. The more knowledge I have
the better help I can give." Natasha was also intrinsically driven to keep her professional skills current, and she enjoyed learning due to

a dedication to and an interest in doing the best job that I can, and to be the most knowledgeable about what's happening. When it comes to a student's experience or student success [and] seeing a bigger picture issue that affects a student's entire experience here, those are the reasons why I like to ... talk about it and learn.

In addition to their interest in supporting student success specifically, practitioners also demonstrated a personal commitment to ongoing learning and development more broadly. Vicky, Natasha, Evan, and Carolyn commented that they "like to learn new things" and described themselves as people who enjoyed acquiring knowledge and solving problems. An interest in learning prompted practitioners to search for new approaches and solutions to the daily challenges they confronted in their departments. This sentiment was echoed by Vicky, who stated that she was, "just naturally a person who likes to know and understand .... and so I'll say 'you know, this is getting frustrating, I wonder if there is a better way to do this?' And then I'll look for options."

Finally, Evan described how his internal interest in learning was enhanced by his desire to help students. He explained, "at first my motivation was [due to] my curiosity of learning new things. It evolved to wanting to help the students and the gratification that comes with knowing that you make a different in a student’s college experience."

**External mandates and pressures.** Even though practitioners demonstrated that their personal commitment to helping students served as an important motivator for learning, most interviewees also expressed that a central motivation for learning about aspects of student success was the Student Success Act of 2012. Several practitioners stated that they participated in student success related learning activities because their students and programs would suffer negative consequences if they were not knowledgeable about the SSSP. For example, Gina
remarked that she dedicated so much time to learning and development because if she did not have a solid understanding of SSSP regulations, she would not be able to develop and execute an successful program. "Without an effective program, the campus risks losing funding," she added.

These pressures drove practitioners to spend almost as much time learning about processes and procedures as they did learning tools and strategies to help students. Brian's frustration with the bureaucratic and administrative aspects of the SSSP was evident when he discussed learning how to complete various reports for the State Chancellor's Office:

I don't mind providing the data if the data directs better practices, but when you spend, I don't know, 40 hours worth of work, and crunching numbers and filling out forms, and learning the new software ... What is done with those numbers? What action is taken after you've put these people through this?

Fittingly, Kevin described this as "initiative fatigue" that often kept practitioners focused on rules and regulations. He explained, "we get so stuck sometimes in this process, on things we have to complete, that we don't always get the opportunity to be creative and find solutions."

These remarks echoed Brian's previous comment that workshops sponsored by the State Chancellor's Office "have been much more at that bureaucratic level of policy implementation."

Several other participants shared a concern about policy-focused learning. Despite their overall preference for relevant, task-based learning as described earlier, practitioners expressed frustration that the SSSP legislation itself was driving the content of learning opportunities. As Gina emphasized, "no one really likes being dictated to."

Michael's remarks relayed his concerns regarding the nature of learning activities provided at the state level:

As those breakout sessions or the main sessions are happening, it strikes me that the problem with a lot of them is they're so down into all of the regulations and the nuts and the bolts and the weeds of things, that there’s very little conversation about the big
picture, about vision, about the future, about leadership. It’s more about managing the intricacies of the stuff.

The focus on graduation and transfer as indicators of student success created a conflict for practitioners, who expressed their concern that the focus on completion would mean that some students' needs could go unmet. For instance, Evan, Vicky, Gina, and Diane explained that their experiences working at community colleges had taught them that students enroll for a variety of reasons, including short-term training, English language learning, and personal development. This struggle was also illustrated by Lily, who was responsible for academic counseling. When asked if her personal definition of student success aligned with SSSP objectives, she explained:

Yes, I want students to complete their goals. No, in the sense of, I think there is almost a systemic discouraging of students from exploring. And that has a personal conflict with me. I can't tell you how often I'm in my office saying [to a student], 'well, as a counselor I'm conflicted. I want you to explore [careers and majors] and I want you to figure out what's going to be the best fit for you. Yet the other part of me as a counselor, knowing what our policies are, by you stating what your education goal is now we can get you out of here quickly and efficiently.' ... that's certainly something that I battle a little bit.

**Inclusion.** Overall, practitioners felt that information about student success programs and goals was being shared adequately and that they had a good understanding of learning and training opportunities available within the CCC system related to student success. However, there were four notable exceptions among the interviewees. Diane, Natasha, Evan, and Vicky, the classified staff members in the study, all described a lack of support and encouragement to participate in development and learning opportunities.

For example, while Vicky had participated in student success related training provided by the State Chancellor's Office, she expressed disappointment that her college had provided few campus-wide learning opportunities devoted to student success where faculty, staff, and management were all invited. She explained that after an initial "kick-off" event that included
classified staff, there had not been any additional opportunities to get together and problem-solve as a group. She remarked, "it was like, okay, we're [staff] actually going to be included in this .... then things just dropped."

Evan noted that it was "extremely difficult to find time to attend workshops and training. Especially when you ... are frontline staff. Services cannot be provided if you are not present and if you have no staff coverage." Similarly, Diane felt that her access to structured learning opportunities was limited. Even though she recognized that many of the SSSP training sessions offered by the state were directed to managers, she often found out "after the fact" about workshops or webinars that were open to a general audience. She explained:

... roadblocks were constantly being put up. Professional development really wasn’t encouraged. I wasn't really released from the office that often, you know, because I was needed there [to help students]. There wasn't a lot of support and assistance ... I just never really felt like it was being promoted to me.

Carolyn, who recently moved from a classified staff position into a faculty position, concurred that she had less access to training as a classified staff member. However, even in her new faculty role, she still had to "discover" learning opportunities on her own. For example, she had only recently learned that the CCC Academic Senate provided SSSP focused workshops and information. Lily, another counseling faculty member, was also unaware that the CCC Academic Senate offered student success related sessions.

As a student services division leader, Kevin noted the difficulty in keeping offices open to provide support for students while at the same time being able to hold training sessions for staff. He stated:

We've tried things [during] convocation where we closed offices to have everyone attend, our classified staff as well as faculty. And we continue to try different things to engage. It's just a matter of carving out that time and space and being able to do it. Now we do convocation, [and] there's opportunity for everyone to come together as a college, but it's in phases because we need coverage in the offices. But yeah, within student services, that
has been our challenge, to have a space and time to check in.

Michael, another campus executive, also noted challenges in ensuring faculty and classified staff involvement in student success learning opportunities. However, he intentionally scheduled time for learning activities that involved all staff, and this had been a significant change for his campus.

I'll say...’if the work you're doing isn’t informed by why we’re doing it, if we can't spend an hour on why we do our work, then what’s the point of being open and doing the work?’ So that was a bit of a shift. But we tried to plan out far enough in advance that we simply made announcements ... so that there was never really any pushback or blowback to it [from students]. And the value of that far outweighed the lost hour of desk time for folks. I think most people really appreciate it.

Review of Emergent Categories and Themes

The themes generated through data analysis offered insight into CCC student services practitioner learning. To summarize, the following categories and themes emerged from data analysis:

- Category 1: *experience*, supported by the themes *current responsibilities* and *past positions*;
- Category 2: *professional development and training*, supported by the themes *relevant* and *regional*;
- Category 3: *with and from others*, supported by the themes *communication* and *problem solving*; and
- Category 4: *influences on learning*, supported by the themes *personal commitment*, *external pressures*, and *inclusion*.

Key Findings

As demonstrated, the participants provided meaningful insight into the nature of practitioner learning related to student success. The following four key findings emerged from
data analysis:

- **Experience was a central source of learning.** Practitioners gained knowledge about student success through on-the-job experiences in their current roles. They also drew upon their previous work experiences to inform their knowledge and competencies as well as to identify where new learning was required.

- **Collaboration and engagement were crucial.** Engaging in ongoing communication, dialogue, and problem solving with colleagues and experts helped practitioners learn about student success issues and strategies. However, when they lacked the time, support, and encouragement to participate, they were unable to benefit from these learning experiences.

- **Practical skills were preferred over theoretical knowledge.** When practitioners sought training and development opportunities related to student success, they were focused on task and context-specific learning that would directly benefit them in carrying out their new responsibilities.

- **Internal and external factors prompted learning.** While practitioners were internally motivated to increase their skills and competencies, they were also faced with external pressures from state legislation that compelled them to participate in learning activities related to student success.

**Research Question Analysis**

Two research questions guided this study: (1) *How do community college student services practitioners in California learn about issues related to student success?* and (2) *Why do community college student services practitioners in California participate in learning related to student success?* The research questions were purposely broad in order to discover what
methods and motivations influence practitioner learning about student success barriers and strategies. This section reviews the categories and themes related to each research question, while Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the nature of practitioner learning related to student success.

**Research Question 1: How do community college practitioners in California learn about issues related to student success?**

The first category identified related to this question was *experiences*, supported by the emerging themes *current responsibilities* and *past positions*. Practitioners learned about student success by performing new responsibilities and assignments in their current jobs related to providing support for students, including tasks involved in implementing the SSSP. Additionally, practitioners had also gained foundational understanding about barriers to student success through their prior experiences, such as past jobs (Aaron, Carolyn), committee involvement (Gina, Natasha), and their own student experiences (Evan, Lily).

For example, Kevin gained extensive experience in assisting students and managing programs through his previous work supporting at-risk high school and college students in academic outreach programs. The prior learning from these experiences, coupled with the new knowledge about barriers to student success that he gained in his current role, increased his overall understanding about ways to improve graduation and transfer rates.

The second category related to this question was *professional development and training*, supported by the themes *relevant* and *regional*. Practitioners participated in a variety of workshops and conferences provided by their campuses, the State Chancellor's Office, and other organizations in California focused on student success. They indicated a preference for training directly related to their job assignments, and primarily chose to attend California-based and
CCC-focused learning opportunities.

This reliance on local and relevant training was demonstrated by Lily, whose learning about student success was gained through campus-based workshops or information on SSSP requirements provided by her department. Specifically, she identified department meetings as her primary source for learning about the SSSP. Local opportunities, such as the California State University annual conference for counselors, also provided learning opportunities for Lily. Like most of the other participants, she did not participate in national professional organizations or outside development opportunities related to student success.

The third category related to this research question was with and from others, supported by the themes dialogue and problem solving. Practitioners emphasized the importance of talking with their colleagues and experts to learn about issues influencing student success and to gain new tools and methods to increase completion rates. They utilized opportunities such as informal conversations or department meetings to work through real challenges they faced on their campuses. When attending workshops or training conferences, they preferred sessions with interactive components that allowed them to hear about best practices from other practitioners dealing with similar problems.

This preference for learning with others was demonstrated by Carolyn, who discussed seeking out senior colleagues on her campus to answer everyday questions, brainstorming with coworkers at department meetings to solve challenging student problems, making connections at conferences to build a network of resources, and learning successful methods from other CCC staff and faculty to incorporate into her own practice.

In summary, practitioners learned about issues related to student success through their work experiences, by attending workshops and training sessions, and through collaboration with
Research Question 2: Why do community college student services practitioners in California participate in learning related to student success?

The category related to this research question was *influences on learning*, supported by the themes *personal commitment*, *external pressures*, and *inclusion*. Practitioners were committed to supporting student success, and this prompted them to seek learning opportunities to continue building their skills. However, they needed encouragement, support, and time away from their daily duties in order to participate in learning activities. Additionally, practitioners were faced with implementing specific SSSP mandates from the state legislature, which required that they devote time to learning the requirements of this policy.

For example, Michael spoke with passion about his commitment to the field of higher education and to creating a positive experience for students. He felt that it was his professional responsibility to continue learning about issues and challenges that students faced. However, he also remarked that most of the state-based training activities he attended focused directly on implementing regulations and policies rather than an overall vision for student success. Michael expressed concern that emphasis was being placed on compliance with the legislation rather than solving each college's challenges. To combat this, he was striving to include many staff and faculty in learning opportunities that focused on a vision for student success so that everyone felt engaged in the process.

To summarize, practitioners were motivated to participate in learning related to student success when they felt included in learning opportunities, because they were personally committed to supporting students, and due to their new responsibilities related to implementing the statewide initiative.
Triangulation of the Data

The study utilized data from documents, interviews, and intake forms. As detailed earlier, nine themes organized under four categories were confirmed through inductive data analysis and reduction procedures. To ensure that findings were grounded in sufficient data, triangulation was conducted. As Miles et al. (2014) note, triangulation can verify findings as well as identify "inconsistent or even conflicting findings" (p. 299).

Following suggestions by Miles & Huberman (1994), Miles et al. (2014), and Creswell (2012), evidence was corroborated both within and across each data collection source and method (e.g. interviews, intake forms, documents). First, a theme needed to emerge from multiple interviews, multiple intake forms, and multiple documents to be validated within that data source (Creswell, 2012). A finding was then validated if at least two separate data methods confirmed the presence of the themes that informed the finding. In other words, triangulation was employed to ensure that each finding was supported by at least three data sources (Miles et al., 2014, p. 299). Tables 3 through 6 provide an overview of the triangulation process and exemplars of evidentiary support that validated themes and findings across data sources.

![Figure 2. Visual display of relationship among categories and themes](image-url)
**Table 5. Data Triangulation for Learning through Experience**

**Research Question 1:** How do community college practitioners in California learn about issues related to student success?

**Category 1: Experience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Evidence</th>
<th>Current responsibilities</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Past experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence from Interviews</strong></td>
<td>&quot;I'm expected to be the campus expert on student success and equity.&quot; (Gina)</td>
<td>&quot;The position that I had with Admissions really does contribute to that knowledge.&quot; (Vicky)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I was able to jump on just in the nick of time and learn as we went.&quot; (Michael)</td>
<td>&quot;I think the longer that you're at an institution, you build the knowledge.&quot; (Natasha)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Evidence from Participant Intake Forms** | Participants identified that their current responsibilities were related to the student success initiative, including:  
• Assessment  
• Education planning and advising  
• Orientation  
• Overall coordination of SSSP | This area was not addressed on the intake form |
| **Evidence from Documents** | Text of the Student Success Act of 2012 described the mandated services focused on assessment, orientation, education planning, and follow-up services all community colleges were required to provide.  
2014 CCC SSSP Handbook described that campus SSSP coordinators were responsible for overall program management for their colleges. | A review of participant profiles showed that they all had extensive experience supporting students. Related previous positions included:  
• Assessment Assistant  
• Admissions Assistant  
• Adjunct Counselor  
• Dean of Students  
• Dean of Counseling and Support Services |
Table 6. Data Triangulation for Learning Through Professional Development and Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1: How do community college practitioners in California learn about issues related to student success?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category 2: Professional Development and Training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Evidence</th>
<th>Relevant</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence from Interviews</td>
<td>&quot;Many of the conferences that I have attended such as the Chief Student Services Officers conference ... have components focused on student success.&quot; (Aaron)</td>
<td>&quot;Sometimes [a conference] is even more effective when it's local. I attended a workshop in town, and that was very beneficial.&quot; (Natasha)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Will it help me help students?&quot; (Diane)</td>
<td>&quot;I prefer the local even more than national.&quot; (Carolyn)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Evidence from Participant Intake Forms | Participants identified that they learned about student success through:  
• Communication from supervisor or other college leaders  
• Communication provided by the Chancellor's Office | Participants identified that they participated in student success related training provided by:  
• College/campus  
• District  
• State Chancellor's Office  
• Statewide professional associations |
| Evidence from Documents | Agenda from 2014 SSSP Directors Training listed sessions devoted to learning about program requirements, developing the budget, and creating required reports.  
2015 RP Group Conference agenda listed a day of workshops dedicated to "From Models to Practice: This day focuses on linking effective models to your own practice" (http://rpgroup.org/sssc15/conference-schedule). | State Chancellor's Office website lists the many learning opportunities provided at the state and regional levels. These included:  
• Annual statewide SSSP Directors Training  
• Regional SSSP workshops  
CCC Academic Senate website provided a list of regional faculty workshops related to student success. |
Table 7. Data Triangulation for Learning With and From Others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Evidence</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dialogue</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I've benefitted the most from my colleagues ... the conversations [and] discussions.&quot; (Evan)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;You're always feeling good and getting validation when you interact with colleagues, but you're also learning great ideas and understanding better.&quot; (Michael)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem Solving</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;[Looking] at these different scenarios that our students fall in ... I really learn a lot from those kinds of examples to address student success.&quot; (Lily)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;... doing all of this brainstorming about what we could do with it [student success plan].&quot; (Vicky)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence from Participant Intake Forms</th>
<th>Participants identified that they learned about student success through:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communication from supervisor or other leaders at the college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communication provided by the Chancellor's Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This area was not addressed on the intake form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence from Documents</th>
<th>Agenda for June 30, 2015, SSSP Credit Plan Overview webinar included an opportunity for interaction and question-and-answer with SSSP experts from the State Chancellor's Office.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2015 RP Group Conference agenda listed a day of workshops dedicated to &quot;Ideas from the Field: This day focuses on sharing effective practices, models, and research&quot; (<a href="http://rpgroup.org/">http://rpgroup.org/</a> sssc15/conference-schedule).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As described on the State Chancellor's Office webpage, the Chief Student Services Officer and SSSP/Matriculation listserve provided opportunities for practitioners to pose questions and share best practices with one another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2015 RP Group Conference agenda listed a day of workshops dedicated to &quot;Problem-Solving: This day allows participants to dive deeper on how to address practical concerns and learn from both experts and peers&quot; (<a href="http://rpgroup.org/">http://rpgroup.org/</a> ssc15/conference-schedule).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8. Data Triangulation for Influences on Learning

| Research Question 2: Why do community college student services practitioners in California participate in learning related to student success? |
|---|---|---|
| **Category 4: Influences on Learning** | **Examples of Evidence** | **Themes** |
| **Evidence from Interviews** | “The gratification that comes with knowing that you make a difference.” (Evan) | “We spend so much time tracking numbers and reporting to people in Sacramento.” (Brian) |
|  | “It's my professional obligation to learn and challenge myself.” (Carolyn) | “A lot of it is the outside influence.” (Vicky) |
|  | “I just didn't feel like it [training] was promoted to me.” (Diane) | “When you're new to a position or when you're new to the culture, you're really willing to fight for it [being included]. That energy is not rewarded.” (Natasha) |
| **Evidence from Participant Intake Forms** | “Helping each student ascertain and attain his/her goals, that's success to me.” (Respondent 19) | “Biggest challenge is from legislature.” (Respondent 18) |
|  | “We are responsible for providing an environment that allows students to enrich, grow, and achieve all dreams.” (Respondent 21) | “Community colleges are not a one size fits all, therefore designing a program that works for everyone is difficult.” (Respondent 4) |
|  | “Communication ... has been lacking. Certain groups get left out.” (Respondent 11) | “There isn't enough training.” (Respondent 14) |
| **Evidence from Documents** | A review of participant profiles showed that all 11 practitioners had extensive experience supporting college and university students. This demonstrated a commitment to the profession of student services. | Text of the Student Success Act of 2012 defined the legislation mandating the SSSP at all CCC campuses. |
|  | 2014 SSSP Handbook described the numerous requirements that all colleges must implement. | Report of the statewide CCC Student Success Professional Development Committee (2013) indicated that efforts "provided limited opportunities for classified and administrative staff" (p. 83) to participate in learning activities. |
Summary

This chapter presented the findings of an instrumental case study focused the nature of learning among community college student services practitioners responsible for implementing student success initiatives. Two research questions guided this study: (1) *How do community college student services practitioners in California learn about issues related to student success?* and (2) *Why do community college student services practitioners in California participate in learning related to student success?* Thirty-five employees responsible for implementing the statewide Student Success and Support Program in California Community Colleges completed an online intake form, providing information about their demographics and personal experiences with professional development related to student success. Eleven of these respondents then participated in follow-up interviews to provide additional information about their learning experiences, needs, and motivations.

Through analysis and triangulation of data from documents, interviews, and intake forms, it emerged that practitioners learned about student success through on-the-job experiences, professional development and training activities, and dialogue and problem solving with colleagues and experts. Involvement in learning activities was influenced by a personal commitment to helping students, external pressures to comply with state mandates, and support and encouragement to participate.

Chapter 5 discusses these findings in light of the literature review and theoretical framework. Additionally, implications for theory and suggestions for practice and future research are provided.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter begins with a review of the study's background, purpose, and methodology. A discussion of key findings in relation to the theoretical framework and scholarly literature is also presented. Next, conclusions are provided, followed by recommendations for theory, future research, and practice. A discussion of the study's limitations is then provided. The chapter concludes with a summary and reflection on the study.

Overview of the Study

A renewed focus on postsecondary completion has prompted community colleges across the country to develop student success initiatives aimed at increasing graduation and transfer rates (Bragg & Durham, 2010; Braxton et al., 2014; O'banion, 2010). Many of these programs center on strengthening student support through advising, guidance, and engagement opportunities (Habley et al., 2012; Karp, 2011; Kolenovic & Karp, 2013; Singer, 2015). Although community college student services practitioners are charged with advancing these completion goals by implementing support programs and services, little is known regarding their competencies, education, and training. In particular, how they learn about barriers and strategies related to student completion is unknown because they are infrequently involved in research on student success (Bensimon, 2007; Ozaki et al., 2014).

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to gain insight into the nature of learning among community college student services practitioners responsible for student success initiatives. An instrumental case study was designed to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Practitioners employed at California Community Colleges (CCC) in the process of implementing the statewide Student Success and Support Program (SSSP) were selected to demonstrate this phenomenon. The study was designed to address the following
research questions: (1) *How do community college student services practitioners in California learn about issues related to student success?* and (2) *Why do community college student services practitioners in California participate in learning related to student success?*

Data collection was completed in three phases. First, key CCC SSSP legislative and training documents were reviewed to provide the researcher with an understanding of the context of the study and to identify the types of learning opportunities provided to CCC student services practitioners. Document analysis was ongoing throughout the study. Second, 35 CCC employees responsible for implementing the SSSP on their campuses completed an online intake form regarding their professional development experiences focused on student success. Third, interviews were conducted with 11 of these respondents to gather in-depth information about their learning experiences, needs, and motivations related to increasing student success.

Inductive analysis of intake form and interview data was then performed employing procedures for qualitative data analysis recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), Creswell (2012), and Stake (1995, 2013). First, overarching themes and concepts were identified through analysis of interview transcripts, documents, and intake forms from each of the 11 central participants (Creswell, 2012). Next, themes were compared across cases in order to discover common ideas and concepts (Stake, 1995, 2013). Redundancies were then identified and themes were reduced and grouped based on patterns and similarities (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Themes were then compared with the literature and theory to identify what was already known about the topic and where new insight had been generated (Creswell, 2012). Through this process, nine themes organized under four categories were developed. Finally, findings were validated through data triangulation. Findings were confirmed if corroborated by at least two separate sources of evidence (Creswell, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles et al., 2014).
Emergent Categories and Themes

Data analysis of documents, intake forms, and interviews revealed the following categories and themes in relation to the research questions:

- **Category 1:** experience, supported by the themes current responsibilities and past positions;
- **Category 2:** professional development and training, supported by the themes relevant and regional;
- **Category 3:** with and from others, supported by the themes dialogue and problem solving; and
- **Category 4:** influences on learning, supported by the themes personal commitment, external pressures, and inclusion.

Overview of Key Findings

Chapter 4 provided a detailed description of the major findings of this study. To review, the analysis of themes and categories revealed four major findings related to practitioner learning.

- **Experience was a central source of learning.** Practitioners gained knowledge about student success through on-the-job experiences in their current roles. They also drew upon their previous work experiences to inform their knowledge and competencies as well as to identify where new learning was required.
- **Collaboration and engagement were crucial.** Engaging in ongoing communication, dialogue, and problem solving with colleagues and experts helped practitioners learn about student success issues and strategies. However, when they lacked the time, support, and encouragement to participate, they were unable to
benefit from these learning experiences.

- **Practical skills were preferred over theoretical knowledge.** When practitioners sought training and development opportunities related to student success, they were focused on task and context-specific learning that would directly benefit them in carrying out their new responsibilities.

- **Internal and external factors prompted learning.** While practitioners were internally motivated to increase their skills and competencies, they were also faced with external pressures from state legislation that compelled them to participate in learning activities related to student success.

**Findings in Relation to Theoretical Framework**

Andragogy, a concept of adult learning developed by Knowles (1974, 1980, 1990, 1995), provided the theoretical underpinning for this study. Andragogy maintains six assumptions of adults related to their (1) readiness to learn; (2) use of past experiences in new learning; (3) orientation to learning; (4) need to know reason for learning; (5) self-concept as learners; and (6) motivation for learning. Overall, the study supported these assumptions of andragogy. The following analysis reviews the study's findings in relation to the principles of andragogy and key studies that explore professional development as adult learning.

**Readiness to Learn**

According to Knowles (1995), adults are ready to learn when life situations present a need for new knowledge or skills. Central to andragogy is the idea that adults are most receptive to learning when their needs, roles, or expectations change (Knowles, et al., 1998). True to this assumption, the practitioners in this study expressed that they needed to learn new techniques, methods, and procedures to support student success due to changing expectations in their jobs.
They cited the evolving needs of their diverse student populations and new responsibilities related to the student success initiative as conditions that prompted them to seek new learning. This finding also supports Dalton and Crosby (2011), Grace-Odeleye (1998), Hirt (2007), Janosik et al. (2006), and Wartell (2013), who posit that student services practitioners face new responsibilities as student demographics, governmental pressures, and institutional priorities change, and that these evolving challenges require ongoing learning and development.

Further, Maurer et al. (2003) note that learning needs surface throughout a workers’ entire career. In some cases, such as for Carolyn, Diane, and Gina, their readiness to learn was induced by taking on a new job with increased responsibilities for providing services related to student retention and completion. For others, like Vicky and Brian, their new SSSP responsibilities were amplifications of previous assignments. For all, the impetus for learning was largely based on the realization that many students were failing to meet their goals. For example, Kevin sought new ways to support students because "students every year are different. And they're coming with different skill sets, different worldviews...[so] how do we deliver a service in a way that they understand, appreciate, and respect, and that honors [those differences]?"

**The Role of Prior Experience**

In the andragogical model, prior experience serves as a fundamental antecedent to learning (Knowles, 1974; 1990). Adults draw from their past personal and professional experiences to support and inform the development of new knowledge and skills. In fact, in Cheetham and Chivers' (2001) study of 80 practitioners in 20 different professions, they find that on-the-job experiences provided the most significant source of learning for employees (p. 271). Similarly, practitioners in this study relied heavily on their prior experiences to inform their understanding of student success barriers and strategies. By reflecting on their past experiences...
and what competencies they had already developed through those roles, practitioners also assessed their new learning needs.

Additionally, practitioners drew from their knowledge of the CCC system (Kevin, Gina), campus processes (Diane, Aaron), and their experiences as community college students (Lily, Evan) to help them make sense of how the new student success initiatives could be implemented in their departments. For example, Vicky's previous role in the admissions office at her campus exposed her to a variety of enrollment and matriculation related processes. She drew from those 10 years of experience when learning about the new student success requirements that became part of her role in the assessment office, such as helping students complete online orientation.

**Need to Know Why Learning is Important**

Knowles (1980, 1990) posits that because adults need to understand how gaining new skills or knowledge will benefit them in their real lives, they will evaluate the benefits gained by learning as well as the negative consequences of not learning (p. 57). Salas et al. (2012) further note that workers need to understand the benefits in learning in order to actively engage in professional development. These concepts were corroborated by practitioners in the study, as they understood the benefits and consequences of learning policies or tools related to student success.

For example, Gina explained that she invested a large amount of time in reading the legislation and the SSSP training manual because she was responsible for effectively implementing the program on her campus. She understood that her campus would suffer negative consequences, such as a reduction in funding, if she did not properly manage the program. Likewise, Lily understood that the better her advising skills and knowledge, the more effectively she could help students.
These findings align with research that suggests professionals will focus their energies on learning what they believe is essential to their practice (Noe & Wilk, 1993; Salas et al., 2012; Yang, 2004). Accordingly, practitioners also expressed a need to know how new learning would be beneficial in their jobs or to their campuses. For instance, Brian indicated that he and his colleagues were required to learn new procedures to report data to the State Chancellor's Office, but he was frustrated by the lack of information about how the data would be used. His campus considered hiring a position responsible for data collection and reporting, and Brian needed to weigh the expense of the new position with how those resources could otherwise be spent. As he put it, hiring a new position would expend resources that we could be using on professional development, on bringing in more workshops, to extend more outreach to the high schools. But no, we have to spend $60,000 to fill out paperwork, and send it off to the State for no apparent reason.

**Orientation to Learning**

Knowles (1995) asserts that adults prefer relevant, problem-based learning that is immediately applicable to their work or lives. Adults are motivated to learn when they believe that it will help them perform in life situations, and when focused on the context in which the learning will be implemented (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). In applying this principle of andragogy, Hansman (2001) notes that adult learners can more easily make meaning of new knowledge through "real-world, context-based learning" (p. 49) that allows them to apply new concepts and skills within their own lives or workplaces.

Likewise, practitioners in this study indicated a preference for contextual learning activities. They focused their time and energies on learning the salient aspects of student success related to their job responsibilities. Whether specifically focused on managing the SSSP mandates, like Gina, or providing day-to-day assistance to students, like Diane, practitioners
expressed a need for learning opportunities that helped them tackle the challenges at hand. Most activities focused either on learning about the state legislation through information and training provided by the State Chancellor's Office or on learning general student success strategies through state and regional organizations.

Practitioners also indicated that they valued learning from problem-solving experiences with colleagues and experts through "case studies" or "scenarios" that discussed real challenges faced by their students. By sharing their own experiences and gaining information about the experiences of others, they were able to learn best practices specifically focused on students in the CCC system. This preference echoes the practitioners in Daley's (1999) study, who sought colleagues to help "understand specific issues [and] system implications" (p. 144) in their work. As Carolyn explained, "there is definitely benefit from hearing from somebody that lives in, you know, North Carolina, about their community colleges, but I can't call that person and ask them what they are doing about SSSP."

**Self-concept as Learners**

Andragogy asserts that because adults are responsible for their own decisions and their own lives, they have a need to be treated as capable and self-directed (Knowles, 1995). They dislike rigid learning situations in which they are being directed on what and how to learn (Knowles, 1990). Therefore, as Knowles et al. (1998) posit, adults should be involved in developing their own learning goals and activities. This focus on adult independence and self-actualization is a key component of andragogy.

Two concepts related to this andragogical assumption emerged from the data. First, practitioners expressed frustration with the fact that student success in the CCC system was being narrowly defined through graduation and transfer initiatives, yet they were required to
develop programs and tools to meet these specific goals. Some practitioners described this as "going through the motions" in order to comply. Further, they expressed that they wanted more autonomy to develop services for their own student populations. Brian commented that he would like to tell state leaders to "let us do our jobs. We are trained professionals with a great interest in helping our community succeed, so get out of our way."

As Hirt (2006) and Tyrell (2014b) suggest, community college practitioners have less autonomy because they must adhere to policies and bureaucratic processes. Yet, Borzaga and Tortia (2006) find that worker satisfaction is influenced by "process-related items" (p. 239) such as autonomy in their work. The study corroborates these claims by highlighting the frustration felt by practitioners when their learning was focused solely on bureaucratic processes and legislation.

Second, practitioners invested time and effort on their own to learn about issues related to student success. While they utilized formal learning opportunities that were sponsored by the State Chancellor's Office or their campus, they also independently sought informal opportunities to increase their competencies. This was enacted through reading articles and bulletins (Lily, Gina), performing independent research (Aaron), seeking assistance from a veteran colleague (Carolyn, Evan), learning the definition of a new term or concept (Natasha), utilizing resources from a professional association (Kevin, Michael), or taking time for self-assessment and reflection (Brian). All participants viewed themselves as competent professionals who were obligated to continue learning for the benefit of students.

These findings reinforce existing research that suggests practitioners must increase their skills in order to better assist students (Ebbers & Rivera, 2015; Lunceford, 2014), and that encouraging practitioners to become independent learners supports both individual and
in institutional goals (Kegan & Lahey, 2010; Tull, 2006). The study confirms that practitioners will invest time into learning in order to increase their student support skills.

Motivation for Learning

According to Knowles et al. (1998), adults are internally motivated to learn when they foresee an intrinsic benefit for themselves. While adults will respond to some external motivators, intrinsic motivators provide the greatest impetus for learning (Knowles, 1995). However, this study found that practitioners were motivated to learn about student success due to both internal and external influences.

Practitioners indicated that they were compelled by internal motivators such as their dedication to students, commitment to the profession, work ethic, and general interest in learning new things. These factors motivated them to spend time understanding the challenges their students faced and searching for ways to improve student experiences. Moreover, the SSSP legislation itself was a strong motivator for learning about student success. Practitioners explained that their students and campuses would suffer if they were unable to perform their job responsibilities or implement an effective program.

The combination of external pressures and personal values created a conflict for several practitioners, as their view of student success was broader than the CCC system's focus on increasing the rate of completion. Similarly, research by Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) and Salas et al. (2012) indicates that disconnect between practitioners' values and work expectations can create conflicts in morale and motivation.

This struggle was demonstrated by Lily, who used words like "conflict" and "battle" to describe her feelings about how the focus on completion was limiting students' opportunities to explore various careers and majors. Vicky also expressed her concern that the focus on
graduation and transfer would ultimately limit opportunities for students with different goals.

When asked what student success meant to her, Vicky said:

There are multiple meanings, all leading to a same core, that the students get what they want with support that they need. The group that seems to be left out is the group that wants to come in and take one class ... or students that want to come here and take English as a Second Language. Successful to them is "I’m learning English." They are never going to transfer, they don’t want to. I think success generally is that the student is happy with the education they got, at the level that they wanted, with the appropriate amount of support services.

At first glance, this discussion of external motivators may seem incongruent with andragogy since Knowles (1995) focuses on the internal motivations of adult learners. However, the focus on policy as a motivator for practitioner learning can also be viewed under Knowles' (1990) assumptions related to need to know and readiness. As discussed earlier, practitioners know they need to learn because of changing student needs and the new SSSP mandates. Further, they are ready to learn due to new assignments related to this legislation. Such reframing is supported by Diaz (2013), who utilizes andragogy in her study of senior student services practitioners at Illinois community colleges, and finds that they supported professional development opportunities for their staff in order to both improve performance and meet institutional goals.

**Findings in Relation to Literature Review**

The review of scholarly literature in the field of student affairs provided a description of the professional preparation of practitioners, a review of ongoing professional learning methods for practitioners, and an understanding of student affairs practice at community colleges. This section examines the findings of the study in light of these literature streams.

**Student Affairs Education and Learning Experiences**

Even though a graduate degree in student affairs is typically seen as a minimum
requirement for entering into a student support role (Haley et al., 2015; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998), several scholars have noted that community college student services practitioners often lack training beyond a bachelor's degree (Dalpes et al., 2015; Kisker, 2005). In contrast, the community college practitioners in this study were more highly educated than the research indicates is common, with 10 of the 11 participants holding graduate degrees.

However, as a group they had limited formal education in student affairs. Disciplines such as leadership, public administration, business administration, and counseling were the most common master's and doctoral degree subjects among the participants. This aligns with existing research suggesting that even when community college student services practitioners hold graduate degrees, they typically have not studied in student affairs (Dalpes et al., 2015; Kisker, 2005; Tyrell, 2014b; Ebbers & Rivera, 2015). The two practitioners in this study who held master's degrees in student affairs, Michael and Natasha, had also previously worked at four-year institutions and had the least experience working in a community college setting.

Notably, even Michael and Natasha, with their formal student affairs training, did not identify their education as a primary source of learning about student success. Instead, they drew from their experiences and focused on their new responsibilities to continue building their competencies related to student success. Similarly, Cooper and Miller (1998) and Janosik et al. (2006) note that because of increasing expectations for student services personnel, it would be impossible for practitioners to gain all necessary skills in a two-year graduate program. Further, because necessary student affairs competencies tend to be dependent upon the type of institution and job responsibilities of the practitioner (Hirt, 2006; Reason & Kimball, 2012; Ozaki et al., 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), practitioners require learning beyond formal preparation programs. The results of this study provided insight on the various ways that practitioners with
and without formal student affairs training continued learning about the needs of their students.

Accordingly, experience in their current jobs and past positions served as a key source of student success learning for practitioners. This aligns with literature in student affairs related to the value of learning new skills and knowledge through on-the-job experiences. For example, in a survey of 171 community college practitioners, Lunceford (2014) finds that on-the-job experiences best prepared them for their responsibilities. Researchers also advocate for work-based learning opportunities such as committee membership, facilitated discussions, increased responsibilities, and problem-solving scenarios to help practitioners to gain practical experience within their current jobs (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Knight, 2014; Reynolds, 2011; Winston & Creamer, 1998). Study participants confirmed that these types of experiences provided valuable learning opportunities. In particular, participants’ experiences learning through dialogue and problem solving with colleagues echoed the literature.

**Ongoing Learning**

Building on the theme of on-the-job learning, many scholars in student affairs suggest that practitioners should focus on career-spanning professional development and skill building through ongoing learning opportunities (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Herdlelin, 2004; Knight, 2014). Researchers agree that practitioners must continually update their competencies in order to effectively serve their campuses as students’ needs evolve (Dean et al., 2007; Grace-Odeleye, 1998; Janosik et al., 2006). In fact, Guskey (2000) goes so far as to state that educational reforms are unsuccessful if employees are not provided with relevant training and development. Further, Shulock (2002) and Strom et al. (2011) suggest that it is essential for community colleges to strengthen employee professional development programs in order to prepare future campus leaders. This ongoing learning can happen at campus training,
regional and national workshops, and professional association conferences (Burkard et al., 2005; Chernow et al., 2003; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998).

Likewise, the practitioners in the study utilized structured professional development and training activities such as workshops and conferences to learn about student success challenges and strategies. This was evidenced by practitioners at all levels. From newer professionals like Diane and Evan, to those at the executive level like Kevin, Brian, and Aaron, all participants stressed the importance of participating in training to keep their skills updated and to remain knowledgeable of student needs. As Kevin noted, each year students are different and their needs change.

Moreover, practitioners described ongoing learning as a professional "obligation," as do Carpenter and Stimpson (2007), who call on practitioners to participate in lifelong learning in order to both serve students effectively and advance the student affairs profession. These findings underscore the importance of providing ongoing development activities for practitioners to continue building their skills and knowledge related to supporting student success (Garber & Wills, 2015; Janosik et al., 2006; Manning et al., 2014; Kuh et al., 2011; Lunceford, 2014).

**Engagement and Inclusion**

With ongoing development so vital to the profession, practitioners must be provided with support to continue learning throughout their careers (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Reynolds, 2011). Indeed, Maurer et al. (2003) assert that "work supports" (p. 708) for learning, such as the availability of development activities and encouragement from supervisors, are vital for ongoing employee learning. They also note that employee participation in learning activities increases the capacity of institutions to meet their goals and objectives.

Although student affairs practitioners are facing ever-increasing responsibilities (Kuh et
al., 2011; Wartell, 2013), researchers have suggested that community colleges do not invest adequate time and resources into developing student services staff (Culp, 2005a; Delport, 2015; Kisker, 2005) or preparing the next generation of campus leaders (Shulock, 2002). Additionally, Gibson-Harmon et al. (2002) assert that community college staff members in non-faculty and non-management roles are often left out of campus professional development efforts, which causes them to feel undervalued by their institutions. The CCC's own Student Success Initiative Professional Development Committee (2013) found that "classified and administrative staff were only marginally able to participate" (p. 83) in student success related professional development and further recommended "a comprehensive approach to improving the skills of all employees .... [aimed at] improved efficiencies and better morale" (p. 83).

Likewise, the classified staff participants in this study reported that they did not receive enough ongoing information about student success planning, goals, and learning opportunities. They also often felt excluded from workshops and meetings and discouraged from collaborating across departments. Managers also expressed difficulty in finding time for staff to participate in learning and planning sessions. For instance, Kevin stated that it was difficult to plan these kinds of activities "without feeling like we're time-crunched." These findings align with the aforementioned research identifying staff training as a weakness at community colleges.

**Community College Student Services**

In Hirt's (2006) comprehensive study of student affairs practice across various types of higher education institutions, she finds that community college practitioners are the most regulated and guided by state mandates and policies. In fact, she asserts that for community college professionals, most changes are "externally induced .... by other campus agencies, or by state or federal entities" (p. 150).
Habley et al. (2012) and Tyrell (2014b) also note that community college practitioners are faced with pressures from governmental entities to improve completion rates, with an increasing focus on performance-based funding related to graduation and transfer rates. A high level of bureaucracy at community colleges causes practitioners to focus on regulations and reduces the level of autonomy and creativity that their counterparts at other types of institutions enjoy (Hirt, 2006; Hirt et al., 2003).

The study affirmed these previous findings by illustrating that CCC student services practitioners were heavily guided and informed by state policy, and that the new system-wide focus on graduation and transfer influenced learning among practitioners. Several practitioners relied on the SSSP legislation to guide their learning about student success issues. Consequently, they prioritized state-based learning activities that directly related to their responsibilities in implementing these mandates. Practitioners expressed some dissatisfaction with this, however, noting that the focus was on compliance and policy implementation rather than leadership, vision, and creativity.

**Conclusions and Implications**

Based on the findings of the study, two significant conclusions were drawn related to engagement and learning content. These conclusions and their implications for practitioners are detailed below.

**Employee Engagement in Ongoing Learning is Crucial for Student Success Planning**

Whether at work, during conferences, or in training sessions, learning from colleagues was paramount for these practitioners. When they had time to interact with other practitioners informally and formally, they increased their understanding about issues and tools related to student success. However, several practitioners noted that finding time for information sharing,
collaboration, and problem solving on busy community college campuses was difficult. Classified staff mentioned that they felt excluded from training and planning opportunities, and managers stated that it was difficult to find time to allow staff to participate in these activities. As Diane and Evan noted, they were rarely able to leave their workstations to attend professional development activities because their offices were so busy serving students.

Yet, supporting the ongoing development of employee skills is one of the most important elements for the success of organizations (Kegan & Lahey, 2010; Nordhaug & Gronhaug, 1994). Further, Guskey (2000) emphasizes that meaningful professional development "is an absolutely necessary ingredient in all educational improvement efforts" (p. 4). Maurer et al. (2003) also note that participation in learning activities builds engagement and institutional commitment among employees. Consequently, failure to address the learning and skill development needs of employees jeopardizes the ability of community colleges to increase student persistence (AACC, 2012; Garber & Wills, 2015; Knight, 2014; Ozaki et al., 2014).

In fact, an independent review of CCC's implementation of the Student Success Act of 2012 found that not enough progress had been made on faculty and staff training and that there was "still much more to address and accomplish .... [including] professional development to complement and bolster CCC's [student success] efforts (Taylor, 2014). As discussed earlier, the CCC's Student Success Initiative Professional Development Committee (2013) noted that staff had few opportunities to participate in training and learning opportunities. This is problematic, as researchers have also highlighted that the lack of attention to professional development specifically available for community college practitioners, who may have less education and training in student affairs than their four-year counterparts, can jeopardize the efficacy of student support programs (Kisker, 2005; Tyrell, 2014b).
This issue has long-term implications for CCC student services. Shulock (2002) noted a deficiency of professional development and credentialing options within the CCC system to prepare employees for leadership positions. Coupled with the ongoing retirement crisis that community colleges are facing, managerial vacancies will continue to arise and there may not be enough trained professionals available to fill them (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Eddy, 2012; McNair et al., 2011; Shults, 2001). If entry and mid-level staff are not provided with the support and resources to participate in learning -- especially during the crucial initial years of SSSP implementation -- there will be a dearth of informed professionals available to take the helm in leading student success initiatives across California in the future.

**Policy Drives Both the Need and Content for Learning, Which May Influence Future Practices in CCC Student Services Focus, Vision, and Delivery**

Tensions existed between the view of student success held by practitioners and the SSSP policy, with practitioners embracing a wider view of success beyond transfer and graduation. Likewise, scholars have noted that while educators view student success broadly as academic achievement, persistence, retention, engagement, and goal attainment, policymakers are more focused on graduation and transfer rates as markers of success (Braxton et al., 2014; Bragg & Durham, 2012; Manning et al., 2014; Perna & Thomas, 2008; Singer, 2015). Study participants recognized that students had short-term goals and came to their campuses with many different academic backgrounds. Consequently, they advocated for the needs of individuals or groups that did not easily fit into enrollment guidelines focused on accelerating completion. As Gina aptly remarked, there are "many pipelines" and pathways to success and "there are different ways [for students] to get there."

Nonetheless, as several practitioners noted, the majority of learning opportunities related
to student success were focused on the SSSP implementation. Even though these new responsibilities prompted practitioners to gain new knowledge and skills about student success, they still expressed a concern that the narrowing definition of success would limit opportunities for students who had other goals, such as English language learning or short-term training.

Study participants were able to draw from their many years of working with and supporting students, which informed their definitions of student success. Therefore, the fact that these particular practitioners were focused on learning their new responsibilities through the State Chancellor's Office SSSP training sessions and other California-based conferences may not be detrimental in the short-term. However, if this trend continues and new practitioners focus solely on learning about student success through the lens of SSSP mandates, this may lead to a widespread view of student success defined solely by transfer and graduation (Braxton et al., 2014). Without a history of student services practice, new professionals may not gain awareness of the unique needs of different populations of students.

Further, a narrow focus on completion policy could lead student services divisions to prioritize compliance and accountability (Habley et al., 2012). As Michael, a senior student services leader, observed:

Are we paying enough attention to why we’re even doing this? I've said before that I think with SSSP, any institution can check off every box and put together a student success plan and the whole deal, and not actually improve any student’s experience. You can go through the motions. You can comply and make no difference, really.

Bensimon and Malcom (2012) echo Michael's concerns that compliance itself may not lead to improved outcomes. They suggest that practitioners have the potential to influence student success and ensure equitable access, "however, doing so requires more than the implementation of standard, off-the-shelf solutions" (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012, p. 3). The long-term implication is that students could "fall through the cracks" if knowledgeable and
experienced professionals are not advocating for their needs and looking for innovative solutions to student success challenges (Bahr et al., 2015; Bensimon & Harris, 2012; Kuh et al., 2011).

**Recommendations for Theory**

Overall, andragogy served as a useful lens through which to view learning among community college practitioners. However, Knowles' (1974, 1980, 1990, 1995) focus on the individual learner and self-directedness of adults emerged as a limitation in applying andragogy to practitioner learning, since participants placed heavy emphasis on learning from colleagues, supervisors, and other practitioners implementing student success programs. Indeed, one of the most significant themes that surfaced from the data was that practitioners learned about student success challenges and strategies through interaction with others. Collaboration was important to all participants.

For example, practitioners often sought a senior colleague when trying to solve a problem in their departments. They also attended conferences to "network" and "make connections" while learning from other professionals who were dealing with similar challenges. By engaging with others at their campuses, regional and statewide meetings, workshops and conferences, and virtually through webinars and email listserves, practitioners gained knowledge of best practices and new tools for improving student success. For instance, Vicky stated that "getting together with my counterparts from other colleges and seeing and hearing how they are doing things, that can always trigger something. Like okay, there’s a better way to do that."

Likewise, Collin et al. (2015) and Cheetham and Chivers (2001) concur that teamwork, networking, and learning from experienced professionals provides essential learning for employees. Daley (1999) also finds that employees learn through "peer-based dialogue" (p. 138). Further, in their study of new student services practitioners, Renn and Jessup-Anger
(2008) note that these employees "sought out seasoned professionals to provide guidance" (p. 328) and relied on colleagues for advice and assistance.

Although Knowles (1990, 1995) and Knowles et al. (2015) mention group discussions, problem-solving activities, case studies, and sharing of best practices within the assumptions of orientation and readiness, learning from others is not a central assumption of andragogy. Instead, Knowles focuses on individual characteristics of adult learners and maintains self-directedness as a chief characteristic of adults (Brookfield, 1992; Daily & Landis, 2014; St. Clair, 2002). This reliance on self-direction and independence has been a criticism of andragogy (Merriam, 2001; Rachal, 2002; Yang, 2003).

Therefore, future theory development focused on student services practitioner learning should consider how andragogy's assumptions related to motivation, orientation, and readiness to learn could be strengthened by concepts from other theories. For example, concepts from communities of practice theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999, 2011), which emphasizes learning among a group of practitioners dedicated to a common goal, or workplace learning theories (Marsick, 1988; Fenwick, 2001; Yang, 2004), which focus specifically on employee learning, could inform future practitioner learning theory. As Webster-Wright (2009) posits, "the social nature" (p. 707) of the workplace provides an opportunity to study how this environment influences learning among employees. These theories may shed light on how and why practitioners choose to learn in collaboration with one another, and inform implications for research and practice.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study provided insight into areas where future research in community college student services practice would be of benefit to the field of student affairs. The following section
offers suggestions for research on practitioners, their roles, and their work environment in order to inform potential learning and training programs that meet their unique needs.

**Characteristics of Community College Practitioners**

First, although this study provided a glimpse into one aspect of community college student services practice, more research is needed to gain a clearer picture of practitioners in this environment. In particular, additional research to identify the educational backgrounds, career patterns, learning styles, and competencies of practitioners would shed additional light on their professional development and learning needs (Ozaki et al., 2014). As described in Chapter 2, community college practitioners have not been adequately represented in student affairs literature, and this may hinder the quality and breadth of support services available for students on these campuses (Kisker, 2005; Knight, 2014).

Characteristics of practitioners at four-year institutions have been well examined, and this research informs student affairs graduate curricula, professional development programs, and the field's research agenda (Cooper & Miller, 1998; Cuyjet et al., 2009; Dalpes et al., 2015; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Tyrell, 2014b). Further, current literature in student affairs assumes that professionals have autonomy and creativity in their work that may not be available to community college student services practitioners who are working under more bureaucracy than their counterparts at four-year institutions (Hirt, 2006; Hirt et al., 2003).

Since student affairs practice varies among different types of institutions (Hirt, 2006) it may not be possible to utilize existing research in developing learning and training programs for community college practitioners. For example, Bensimon (2007) notes that without a research base to inform their practice, community college practitioners may have developed their own working theories about students that are incorrect. Therefore, these practitioners may require
training in student development theories that graduate-trained professionals may not need. Thus, expanded research on community college student affairs would provide insight on the specific needs of these practitioners.

**Practitioner Roles Within Community Colleges**

Next, research exploring the various employee roles at community colleges would be useful in describing student affairs practice at two-year institutions. While some limited studies in community college student services focus on specific employee populations, such as senior student affairs officers (Garber & Wills, 2015), mid-level managers (Tyrell, 2014a), or new professionals (Dalpes et al., 2015), most research excludes classified support staff and frontline workers.

This study included participants from the three primary employee categories in California Community Colleges -- faculty, managers, and classified staff -- and clearly identified each participant. The research findings highlighted differing feelings of engagement and inclusion in learning activities between classified staff members and other participants, with classified staff more often noting their lack of support to participate in such activities. However, it was beyond the scope and purpose of the study to provide a detailed comparison of attitudes and experiences among the groups. To gain a comprehensive understanding of community college practice, additional research must capture the voices of all types of professionals supporting students. Utilizing a more defined research population would also help identify unique needs among employee groups and could help inform targeted training and development programs (Gibson-Harmon et al., 2002).

**Student Affairs Practice Within a Policy-Driven, Bureaucratic Environment**

Finally, there is also a need for more research focused on practitioners working with state
and federal regulations generally, and improving completion rates specifically, in order to understand how bureaucracy and external change (Hirt, 2006) influence student affairs practice. Bensimon (2007) notes that experiences of practitioners implementing retention and completion programs have not been adequately explored in scholarly research, and "when scholars [do] attempt to translate their findings into recommendations for action, practitioners are rarely ever the target of change or intervention" (p. 444). Consequently, there is insufficient scholarly literature available that examines the phenomenon of enacting federal or state level policies to design and deliver student services from the perspective of practitioners (Braxton et al., 2014). Rather, research on these programs focuses on student outcomes, efficiency, and policy.

Yet, Lovell and Kosten (2002) assert that student services practitioners must "understand the implications and ramifications of policy at the local, state, and national levels .... [and have] a keen understanding of the policymaking process" (p. 568). Due to the lack of research specifically focused on this issue, it is unknown how well practitioners are prepared for these responsibilities and if their efforts are effective. As Guskey (2000) highlights, attention to professional development is a vital component of educational reform. However, before learning activities can be developed, it is essential to recognize the experiences and needs of learners (Cooper & Miller, 1998; Knowles, 1990; Noe & Wilk, 1993; Salas et al., 2012).

Thus, without knowledge of practitioner experiences in a bureaucratic work environment, efforts to transform and improve student engagement and success may lack efficacy as the learning needs of those practitioners continue to go unmet (AACC, 2012; Bensimon, 2007; Ozaki et al., 2014). This study highlighted the internal conflicts practitioners faced in implementing a state-legislated program that did not align with their own definitions of student success, but the literature does not shed light on whether this is a widespread phenomenon in
Recommendations for Practice

Drawing on the findings of the study, literature, and theory, several recommendations for practice are offered. These suggestions are aimed at practitioners, colleges, and student affairs professional associations in the areas of campus-based advocacy, professional development, and vision for student success.

Practitioner Level

First, practitioners should continue learning about and advocating for their students' needs by voicing concerns to their campus, district, and state leaders. The practitioners in the study were deeply concerned that student success as defined by graduation and transfer rates would limit possibilities for students who had different goals. Likewise, researchers (e.g. Bahr et al., 2015; Bragg & Durham, 2012; Chapa et al., 2006) have cautioned that promoting a student completion agenda in community colleges, with their multiple missions, may limit access to higher education for at-risk students. In their study of state-level programs geared toward increased completion, Braxton et al. (2009) find "little evidence that state lawmakers are encouraging the important factors for success" (p. 2), such as increasing student engagement. As community colleges across the nation work to increase completion, they are also still tasked with helping students gain short-term training, English language skills, remediation, and other non-completion related educational services (Culp, 2005a; Thelin, 2011; Kuk, 2015).

Despite these concerns, attention to completion is still necessary. Ultimately, helping students reach their goals, especially the completion of postsecondary credentials, serves both student and economic interests (Johnson, 2009; Moore & Shulock, 2009; White House, 2015). However, as Bragg and Durham (2012) posit, "in an era when college completion dominates the
policy agenda, matters of access and equity become equally important" (p. 120). Student services practitioners, with their first-hand knowledge of student populations and deep commitment to helping students achieve their goals, are a fitting group to promote attention to access and success at their institutions (Bensimon & Harris, 2012; Manning et al., 2006; Roper, 2011).

As Kuh et al. (2011) note, with increased accountability to federal and state policymakers and pressures to focus on completion rates, "the times require reflective, student-centered professionals" (Preface, para. 3) who can help their campuses move the needle on student access and persistence. Thus, practitioners must also invest time in learning leadership and advocacy skills that enable them to create a long-term vision and strategic plan to meet the needs of their communities (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Kisker, 2005; AACC, 2012). Michael serves as a model for this ethos. He refused to allow the SSSP legislation to narrowly define his own learning and restrict his campus' view of student success. He explained:

So what I really try to do here is say, 'Look, we're going to comply [with the SSSP legislation], but let's not worry about that stuff.' Let's worry about focusing on ... what we need to do to help students identify and achieve their goals in a more timely fashion [and] to get more students to their end goal in a better way. And as we've done that, we cycle back and say, “Does this match what we need to be doing?” Yeah, it does but we haven't focused on the details of the [policy] implementation. We've focused on Where do we have challenges? What kind of vision do we want to create for change? What kind of institution do we want to be?

**Campus Level**

Next, community colleges should invest resources in developing training programs targeted at student services personnel. The literature (Culp, 2005a, 2005b; Bensimon, 2007; Gibson-Harmon et al., 2002) and this study's findings show that practitioners did not have enough access to professional development opportunities. Indeed, Delport (2015) finds that these activities at community colleges are "offered infrequently and inconsistently for student
services practitioners" (p. 85). Yet, when encouraged, on-the-job experiences and ongoing professional development provided meaningful learning experiences for these practitioners. Because community college practitioners may lack formal training in student affairs (Dalpes et al., 2015; Kisker, 2005; Tyrell, 2014b), they could benefit from in-house learning opportunities guided by a framework built on principles of adult learning.

For instance, as presented in Chapter 2, Ebbers & Rivera (2015) propose a learning concept for community college practitioners that builds on the apprenticeship model and incorporates adult education concepts such as problem-based learning. This framework for learning also recognizes that practitioners bring valuable experiences to the learning environment that can inform their continued skill building (Knowles, 1974, 1995; Knowles et al., 2015). Such concepts could inform how personnel at community colleges build their skills to tackle timely and relevant issues such as implementing legislative mandates and initiatives.

The American Association of Community Colleges has encouraged two-year colleges nationwide to invest resources into professional development and learning in order to increase student success, asserting that "successful colleges of the future will be the ones that today are cultivating new generations of leaders at all administrative levels" (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002, p. 1). Thus, provision of professional learning activities for community college employees is essential not just in California, but across the nation.

**Profession/Field Level**

Finally, CCC practitioners should be provided with opportunities to expand their learning beyond state and regional borders to engage with national student affairs organizations and related professional associations. Practitioners in this study largely relied on learning about student success issues from California-based training programs and from their CCC colleagues,
whether through the State Chancellor's Office or state and regional organizations. The learning activities provided to help practitioners understand the mandates were focused on, as one practitioner noted, "the nuts and bolts of the program rather than the larger picture" of student engagement and achievement. While in the short-term this helped practitioners understand and meet the goals of the statewide mandate, in the long-term this might mean that practitioners develop a limited portfolio of strategies to tackle student success barriers.

The reality is that these CCC practitioners are not alone in their disengagement with the larger student affairs professional community. In fact, few community college student services professionals are involved in the chief national professional associations (Dalpes et al., 2015; Delport, 2015; Munsch & Cortez, 2014) and campus personnel may not be aware of the resources available through these organizations (Delport, 2015; Gutierrez, 2013; Marcus, 1999). However, student affairs professional associations are vital to practitioner professional development, since involvement provides opportunities for networking, ongoing training, access to research and best practices in the field, and exposure to new thoughts and viewpoints (Chernow et al., 2003; Harned & Murphy; 1998; Janosik et al., 2006).

As Carpenter and Stimpson (2007) assert, practitioners must seek "opinions different from our own about issues facing students" (p. 280) in order to expand professional competencies. Thus, interaction with colleagues from other community college systems or institutional types may help CCC practitioners gain knowledge and best practices from professionals who have created and implemented different kinds of student success programs. Perhaps most importantly, these learning opportunities should be made available to practitioners at all levels of the organization, including frontline and support staff who have an interest in moving into student services leadership roles. Attention to professional development may help
institutions develop future leaders and managers who are prepared to lead strategic planning and implementation related to student success (Garber & Wills, 2015; Shults, 2001; Shulock, 2002).

Student affairs organizations such as NASPA/Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and ACPA/College Student Educators International could take the lead by providing outreach to community colleges -- building awareness of their organizations, offering more robust community college-focused learning opportunities, and providing short-term incentives such as free or reduced cost memberships. Associations should also engage with community college-focused organizations, such as the American Association of Community Colleges, in order to develop meaningful partnerships that support student services personnel -- a recommendation made by Marcus (1999) that has seen little progress. Through intentional and targeted engagement with community college professionals, associations may also indirectly help increase the amount of research that includes these practitioners, since many peer-reviewed studies on student affairs practitioners utilize the membership databases of these organizations to recruit participants.

**Limitations**

While the study provided valuable insights for research and practice in community college student services, it is important to consider factors that potentially limit the generalizability of findings. Three possible limitations are described below.

**Location**

Given the diversity of the California Community Colleges in terms of size, institutional characteristics, and student demographics, this system served as a rich site to explore the problem of practice. However, the location may also be considered a limitation, as the framework of 113 autonomous colleges guided by a state governing board may not reflect other
community college systems that are governed either more or less centrally (Kuk, 2015). College systems across the nation are organized and governed in a variety of ways, which gives practitioners at some campuses more control over strategic initiatives and bureaucratic processes (Hirt, 2006; Kuk, 2015). However, the study did help shed light on workplace learning at community college campuses where practitioners are implementing initiatives developed at a system or statewide level.

**Population**

As discussed in Chapter 3, the CCC State Chancellor's Office did not report the total number of employees directly or indirectly responsible for SSSP implementation at the time the study was conducted. Therefore, it was not possible to determine the potential sample size of employees with student success related responsibilities using available data. However, participants represented all three CCC employee categories and held a range of roles related to student success programs. They also hailed from a variety of campuses across the state in terms of size, region, and student population. In these ways, the study participants were able to provide a view of the topic from multiple perspectives (Stake, 1995; Jones, 2002; Merriam, 2009b).

**Response Bias**

According to Creswell (2012), "response bias occurs ... when the responses do not accurately reflect the views of the sample and the population" (p. 391). Consequently, it is possible that the participants who took the time to complete the intake form and volunteer for interviews may have been more interested in student success issues than other CCC employees. Participants may also have been more committed to their own learning and professional development than other practitioners. Therefore, their experiences and views of learning about student success methods and strategies may not have been reflective of the larger population of
CCC student services practitioners. Nonetheless, the study did provide a view into learning among community college employees who were committed their roles in increasing student success.

**Summary and Reflections**

The study succeeded in its goal of shedding light on the nature of learning among community college student services practitioners who implement mandatory student success programs. Through analysis of the research questions and interrogation of the data, it was discovered that practitioners learned about student success through on-the-job experiences, professional development and training, and collaboration with others. Each of these modes of learning was influenced by external pressures, personal commitment, and inclusion.

While the study began to address existing literature gaps in student affairs, it was noted that additional research is needed involving community college student services practitioners. Suggestions for practice were also provided related to learning and development opportunities for practitioners. Finally, the study contributed to the field of student affairs by providing recommendations for ways that professional associations could expand research and support in community college student services.

As Perna and Thomas (2008) assert, "no single approach to policy or practice will improve student success for all students" (p. 56). This study provided a window into the experiences of community college practitioners working to improve student outcomes, but continued exploration is necessary. Community colleges enact a diverse mission of career training, remediation, transfer preparation, and lifelong learning for an increasingly diverse and underprepared population of students (Bragg & Durham, 2012; Fike & Fike, 2008; Lazerson, 2010). It is clear that the new model of success for community colleges is focused on graduation
and transfer rates, and that student services practitioners on these campuses will continue to face
internal and external pressures to help students complete their educational goals.

These institutions will not succeed in increasing student completion without harnessing all available resources, including the skills and talents of practitioners who support students outside the classroom. Inattention to the needs of community college personnel will hinder the capacity for student affairs as a field to continue influencing higher education in a profound and expansive way. Roper (2001) acknowledges that "the scholarship of student affairs may not show the breadth of our thinking about our institutions and our work" (p. 398). Without genuine and sustained attention to colleagues who serve nearly half of all of the nation's undergraduates, the profession cannot live up to its espoused values of access, inclusion, lifelong learning, and development beyond the classroom -- values deeply held by practitioners at all types of institutions.
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Appendix A: Call for Participants

Dear Student Services Administrator,

My name is Tonia Teresh and I am a student at Northeastern University. I am currently conducting a study as part of my doctoral thesis to explore the professional development and learning needs of community college personnel. Specifically, this study focuses on faculty, staff, or managers who have responsibilities for implementing any component of the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP).

Phase 1 of this study consists of a brief questionnaire that includes information related to your experiences with the SSSP and basic demographic information. All faculty, classified staff, and managers responsible for implementing any portion of the SSSP on your campus are invited to participate in this questionnaire.

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents are invited to volunteer for Phase 2 of the study. Phase 2 will consist of telephone interviews with volunteers in order to learn more about their learning experiences and interests related to student success professional development.

Please consider participating in this study. Additionally, I request that you please forward this email to personnel within the student services division of your college in order to assist with recruitment of additional participants. Participation is entirely voluntary.

The introduction page of the questionnaire provides more information about the study. The link to the online questionnaire can be found at: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/26BL36R

Feel free to contact me at [email] if you have any questions. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Tonia Teresh
Doctor of Education Candidate
Northeastern University
Appendix B: Participant Intake Form

Part 1: Practitioner Experiences with Student Success and Support Program (SSSP)

1. What areas of the SSSP are you responsible for implementing, organizing, or providing to students? (check all that apply)
   - Overall coordination/direction of the SSSP for my college/district
   - Orientation
   - Assessment
   - Student education plan
   - Academic advising or counseling
   - Follow-up services for at-risk students
   - Related support services, such as student outreach, enrollment, or financial aid
   - Budget management
   - Research related to student success and matriculation
   - Developing and administering related policies
   - Other (please specify) __________________________

2. In what programs, requirements, or aspects of the SSSP do you feel the most knowledgeable? (check all that apply)
   - Orientation
   - Assessment
   - Student education plan
   - Academic advising or counseling
   - Follow-up services for at-risk students
   - Related support services, such as student outreach, enrollment, or financial aid
   - Budget management
   - Research related to student success and matriculation
   - Other (please specify) __________________________

3. In what programs, requirements, or aspects of the SSSP do you feel the least knowledgeable? (check all that apply)
   - Orientation
   - Assessment
   - Student education plan
   - Academic advising or counseling
   - Follow-up services for at-risk students
   - Related support services, such as student outreach, enrollment, or financial aid
   - Budget management
   - Research related to student success and matriculation
   - Other (please specify) __________________________

4. Where have you obtained most information related to SSSP requirements?
   - I have not obtained information about SSSP requirements
   - Communication from my supervisor or other leaders at my college/campus
   - State-wide announcements provided by the Chancellor's Office
   - Other (please specify) __________________________
5. Approximately how many hours of training, learning, or professional development activities have you participated in related to student success and completion? (this can include webinars, campus flex day events, statewide training, etc.)
   - I have not participated in such training activities
   - 1-5 hours
   - 6-10 hours
   - 11-20 hours
   - 21 hours or more

6. If you have participated in any training, learning, or professional development activities related to student success and completion, who was the organizer/sponsor of such activities? (check all that apply)
   - I have not participated in such activities
   - My college/campus
   - My district
   - Chancellor's Office (in person or webinars)
   - State-wide professional associations
   - National professional associations
   - Other (please specify) __________________________

7. In your own words, how do you personally define or describe student success?

8. Do you believe that your college or district views student success differently than you do?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Not sure

9. If "yes" to Question 8 above, then how does your college or district define or describe student success?

10. What do you see as the biggest challenges in increasing student success on your campus?

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
11. What is your CCC job classification?
   - Classified staff
   - Faculty
   - Management
   - Other (please specify) __________________________

12. What functional area best describes your department?
   - Student services
   - Instruction or academic area
   - Business or administrative services
   - Other (please specify) __________________________
13. Size of your institution (by student headcount)
   - 50,000 students or larger
   - 25,000 to 49,000
   - 10,000 to 24,999
   - 3,000 to 9,999
   - under 3,000

14. What general geographic region of California describes where your college is located?
   - Northern - San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento, North Coast, Far Northern Areas
   - Central - Central Valley, Central Coast, Gold Country
   - Southern - Los Angeles, San Diego, Inland Empire, Deserts

15. How long have you worked professionally within the California Community Colleges?
   - 0-5 years
   - 6-10 years
   - 11-15 years
   - 16-20 years
   - 21 years or more

16. What is your highest completed educational level?
   - Some high school
   - High school diploma/GED
   - Career/technical certificate
   - Associate's degree
   - Bachelor's degree
   - Master's degree
   - Doctorate degree
   - Other (please specify) __________________________

17. How do you describe your race/ethnicity? (check all that apply)
   - Native American or Alaskan Native
   - Asian, Pacific Islander, or Filipino
   - Black or African American
   - Hispanic or Latino
   - White or Caucasian
   - Decline to state
   - Other (please define if you choose to do so) __________________________

18. What is your gender identity?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Transgender
   - Decline to state
   - Other (please define if you choose to do so) __________________________
Part 2: Interview Recruitment

You are invited to participate in the second phase of this study, which consists of a telephone interview with the student researcher (Tonia Teresh). Your participation will help the researcher gather more information about the learning and development experiences of personnel who are working with the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP).

During the interview, you will be asked questions about your professional development and training experiences and needs related to increasing student success. All responses will be kept anonymous, meaning that information that would make your identity known to others will not be published. Selection for this study is not guaranteed.

If you are willing to participate in a 45-60 minute telephone interview, please provide your contact information below, then click the "Done" button.

If you do not want to participate in interviews, simply skip the question below and click the "Done" button.

Please note that your personal information will be separated from the previous questions. Only the researchers will have access to your contact information, and this information will only be used to communicate with you regarding this study.

19. YES, I am interested in participating in a follow-up telephone interview. Please include your contact information below.

   First name ________________________________

   Email address ________________________________

   Telephone number ________________________________
Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. Briefly describe your responsibilities related to increasing student success on your campus or within your district.

2. How have you learned about issues related to student success in general and the student success initiative specifically?

3. In what areas related to student success do you feel that you are already trained and well-prepared, and in what areas do you feel that you need additional training?

4. How would you describe the support you have received from your direct supervisor and campus or district leadership in increasing student success?

5. What motivates you to participate in learning or professional development activities? Why do you seek to increase or build your professional skills?

6. How do you assess areas in which you need additional knowledge or training? In other words, how do you know what you don’t know?

7. What types of professional development, training, and ongoing learning activities do you find most helpful? Why?

8. Imagine it is five (5) years after the SSSP is fully implemented. Describe what "student success" looks like or means to your campus.
# Appendix D: List of Documents Reviewed For Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>How Accessed</th>
<th>Relation to Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Success Task Force (SSTF) Report of Final Recommendations</td>
<td>Downloaded from CCC Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) website</td>
<td>Provided comprehensive overview of SSTF findings related to student success and completion; explained the recommendations that led to Senate Bill 1456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Success Act of 2012 (California Senate Bill 1456), full text of legislation</td>
<td>Downloaded from CCCCCO website</td>
<td>Provided detailed description of state law mandating CCC student success program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) <em>Progress Report on the Student Success Act of 2012</em> (Taylor, 2014)</td>
<td>Downloaded from LAO website</td>
<td>Provided an independent analysis of SB 1456 progress as of July 3, 2014; included a section devoted to professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 SSSP Handbook</td>
<td>Downloaded from CCCCCO website</td>
<td>Described SSSP campus-level requirements, including programs, budgets, and staffing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of current job responsibilities and past experiences of each participant</td>
<td>Obtained from participants/college websites/LinkedIn</td>
<td>Provided information regarding current responsibilities, past experiences, and educational backgrounds of participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix E: Examples of Code Compression and Category Assignments

**Table 9. Examples of Label and Code Compression**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial In Vivo Labels</th>
<th>Compressed Descriptive Codes</th>
<th>Assigned Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I learn everyday&quot;</td>
<td>CJ = Current Job</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I'm responsible for knowing the policy&quot;</td>
<td>PJ = Past Jobs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The position I had with Admissions&quot;</td>
<td>CM = Committees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;When I was in the other office&quot;</td>
<td>OE = Other previous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;All of my positions&quot;</td>
<td>experiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The day-to-day conversations&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I am on the Matriculation Committee&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;From the SSSP Implementation Committee&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;From being a student&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Chief Student Services Officers Meetings”</td>
<td>WS = Workshops</td>
<td>Professional Development and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Annual SSSP Directors Training by State Chancellor’s Office”</td>
<td>CF = Conferences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Webinars and workshops hosted by Chancellor’s Office”</td>
<td>TR = Training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Staff meetings”</td>
<td>ME = Meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“CCC Academic Senate workshops”</td>
<td>ON = Online training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“CCC Assessment Coordinators Association meetings”</td>
<td>CO = Chancellor’s Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“RP Group Student Success Conference”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Walk down the hall ... to ask a colleague&quot;</td>
<td>CW = Coworkers</td>
<td>With and From Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I went into my coworker's office&quot;</td>
<td>CO = Chancellor's Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Problem-solving with my supervisor and colleagues&quot;</td>
<td>CP = Other CCC practitioners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Contacted the Chancellor's Office&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Benefit of going to a conference ... ask someone dealing with SSSP&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;With my counterparts from other colleges&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Networking, making connections&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;It just wasn't promoted to me&quot;</td>
<td>IN = Being included</td>
<td>Influences on Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Felt like we [staff] were going to be included, then things just dropped&quot;</td>
<td>SU = Support and encouragement to attend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Your efforts are not rewarded&quot;</td>
<td>PC = Personal commitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Challenge in ... finding that time and space&quot;</td>
<td>HS = Help students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I was needed in the office to help students&quot;</td>
<td>PO = Professional obligation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;My dedication to doing the best job&quot;</td>
<td>LL = Lifelong learner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Gratification in helping students&quot;</td>
<td>EX = External pressure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Gosh, it's just my professional obligation&quot;</td>
<td>SM = State mandate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I'm just naturally a person who likes to learn&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Always looking for new ways&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Legislature is the problem&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Tell the state to get out of our way ... let us do our jobs&quot;</td>
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</table>
Appendix F: Northeastern University IRB Approval

Northeastern

Notification of IRB Action

Date: May 13, 2015

Principal Investigator(s): Bryan Patterson
                        Tonia Teresh

Department: Doctor of Education
            College of Professional Studies

Address: 20 Belvidere
         Northeastern University

Title of Project: Understanding the Professional Development Needs of Staff
                  Members Who Implement Student Success Initiatives

Participating Sites: N/A

Informed Consent: Two (2) unsigned consents

As per CFR 45.46.117(c)(2) signed consent is being waived as the research presents no more than
minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally
required.

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

Approval Expiration Date: MAY12, 2016

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. Informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants
   into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new
   information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be
   reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the
   expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other
   university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nas C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630