

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

AN EXAMINATION OF FACTORS THAT SHAPE AFRICAN-AMERICAN  
STUDENT PARTICIPATION WITHIN STUDENT EQUITY PROGRAM  
DEVELOPMENT IN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership

By

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## Dedication

This work is dedicated to my kids, Traustin and Trinity and the young,  
black, and gifted scholars seeking for the chance to be  
heard in our world, to inspire the change  
they hope to see. To my wife, Trina, for her  
relentless support through the  
swirling course of the journey,  
your story of PAVAC  
inspired me through  
the process.

To Mom  
and Dad,  
your sacrifices afford me the greatest  
access to remain a learner. To my brother,  
Sly, for reminding me to laugh and not take myself too  
serious. To my sisters, for their relentless prayers and support.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Copyright	ii
Signature Page	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgement	v
Abstract	x
Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem	1
Introduction	1
Research Problem	2
Research Purpose and Significance	3
Research Questions	4
Theoretical Framework	4
Overview of Methodology	5
Limitations and Delimitations	6
Organization of the Dissertation	7
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature	9
African American Students' Experiences in College	9
African American Students' Involvement	14
Student Services Program Development Process in Community Colleges	17
Student Equity Programs in Community Colleges	18
Theoretical Framework	21
Structural vs. Functional Participation in program Development	22
Validation Theory	23

Summary of the Literature and Statement of Research	24
Chapter 3: Methodology	26
Research Purpose and Question	26
Chapter Organization	26
Research Approach	27
Research Tradition: Grounded Theory	27
Case Study Design	29
Research Setting and Context	30
Program Setting: Impacted Learner Program (ILP)	31
Sampling Strategy	33
Research Participants Protection	35
Data-Collection Instruments and Procedures	35
Research Invitations	36
Informed Consent Form	36
Interview Protocols	37
Data-Collection Procedures	37
Interviews	38
Documents and Archival Data	39
Data-Analysis Procedures	39
Preliminary Data Analysis	40
Thematic Data Analysis	40
Interpreting	41
Researcher's Roles	41

Mitigating Strategies	43
Researcher Bias	43
Participant Reactivity	43
Chapter 4: Methodology	45
Introduction	45
Chapter Organization	45
Data Analysis	46
Simultaneous Data Collection & Analysis	46
Segmenting and Coding	47
Participants	47
Results	48
Importance of Sense of Belonging on Campus	49
Peer Interaction	50
Traditional vs. Nontraditional Students	52
Student-Faculty Interaction	54
Institutional Barriers to Participation	55
Political Nature	55
Faculty Attitude	57
Shared Governance	58
Student Equity Committee	58
Program Development Challenges	60

Planning	60
Events	61
Student Awareness/Visibility	63
Inadequate Benefits	64
Funding	66
Student Willingness	67
Summary of Results	68
Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications	70
Summary of Results	71
Discussion and Findings	71
Validating African American Students' of Sense of Belonging	72
Institutional Barriers that Limit African American Student Participation	73
Purposeful Student Involvement in Shared Governance	74
Study Limitation	77
Recommendation for Future Practice	77
Conclusion	81
References	83
Appendix A: Research Invitation	91
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form	93
Appendix C: General Interview Guide for Student Participants	100
Appendix D: General Interview Guide for Coordinator/Advisor Participants	103

## ABSTRACT

### AN EXAMINATION OF FACTORS THAT SHAPE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT PARTICIPATION WITHIN STUDENT EQUITY PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

Austin Kemie

Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership

The purpose of this grounded theory case study is to examine factors that shape African American students' participation in student equity program development. There is lack of existing information about African American students in community colleges who serve dual roles as beneficiaries and developers of student support programs. Through qualitative methods including interviews, document review, and researcher notes, this study explores factors that affect student participation in program development process. Student equity program development process occur with little to no student input. Yet, institutions are concerned with why program's failure to retain these students increases. This study explored African American students experience at community colleges, institutional barriers to student participation and student's role in shared governance process. The goal of this study is to explore factors that hinder student participation during program development process for greater program improvement. The result of the study showed that validating African American students' sense of belonging is crucial to participation, institutional politics can serve as barrier to student participation and African

American students can be effective with proper training in share governance as the development of student equity programs occur.

## **CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

### **Introduction**

In order to equalize the educational playing field among students beyond access for student success at community colleges, student equity undertook a new charge by the California State Legislature to encourage institutions to go beyond the goal of structural diversity. An educational equity not only through a diverse and representative student body and faculty but also through educational environments in which each person, regardless of race, gender, age, disability, or economic circumstances, has a reasonable chance to fully develop his or her potential (Title 5, section 66010.2c).

In 1992, California Community Colleges Board of Governors (BOG) adopted student equity policy with the goal of ensuring that groups historically underrepresented in higher education have an equal opportunity for access, success, and transfer (Community College League of California, 2015). Colleges responded with less than enthusiastic support for such policy mainly because of lack of funding to achieve proposed changes. To encourage responses from colleges, the BOG amended the policy to mandate institutions to submit and implement a student equity plan in order to receive state apportionment funding. Several years later, policy to develop and implement student equity plan was permanently adopted as part of the requirement for Title 5.

Student Equity Plan (SEP) requirements under Title 5 held institutions obligated to capture and report disproportionately impacted student groups, those falling behind in comparison to their peers on the student success indicators in five areas (Access, Course Completion, ESL and Basic Skills, Degree and Certificate Completion and Transfer). While colleges did not receive funds for this effort, identification of disproportionately

impacted students report was expected nevertheless. Some campuses created programs to support these student groups to meet their needs with a shoestring budget, while others simply reported without support of funding.

In 2014, California Governor Jerry Brown designated \$100 million for student equity. The purpose was to improve campus-level programs to enable colleges to close student achievement gaps. The intent of the Governor's action was to reduce inequities for underrepresented groups on campuses. Campuses acted quickly to submit new updated SEPs to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) for assessment layered with the hope of receiving funding for programs.

As part of their implementation plans, institutions generally formed a committee that would become a think-tank of sorts to help guide the process and make recommendations for projects aimed at ameliorating equity gaps. The structural composition and the functional process of the student equity committee was an immediate challenge to why institutions continue to fail at reaching student success on its proposed timetable.

### **Research Problem**

The research problem that this study addresses is particularly important. While prior research on student involvement calls for institutional participation from students at all levels of education, the majority of research on student involvement and participation tends to center on four-year institutions. Student involvement at four-year institutions has been well-researched, yielding student involvement theory by Astin (1984) and others and aspects like student demographic by Guiffrida (2004) have also investigated of role students' ethnicity plays in participation. However, there is the dearth of literature that

exists about African American community college students who are beneficiaries of the programs in which they are involved as program developers.

In general, community colleges offer opportunities for students to participate in planning and implementation of programs. Shared governance, used as vehicle by internal stakeholders to proclaim an active voice in institutional affairs, offers students a chance to participate through their membership in the process. Students gain access to committees through institutional student government platform as representatives. However, as elected representatives of the campus student body, student representatives only provide a narrow view of the students whom they represent. Therefore, they are limited in ability to offer significant contribution in the committee setting to stimulate transformative change, especially for student equity program development.

Student equity committee participation is no different from other institutional governance committee. In fact, student equity committees mimics the structural nature of all shared governance committees at California community colleges. Student government representatives are supposed to serve student constituents in order to ensure all students' representation in the process are recognized. However, this approach causes a significant barrier to contribution of student equity program development because participants who understands the need for change to student equity programs development are excluded from gaining access to shared governance process. Engaging these students input for program change that they are beneficiaries, provides insight to campus leaders that aim to truly close the achievement gaps and achieve lasting student success.

### **Research Purpose and Significance**

The purpose of this study is to examine students' participation within student equity program development. This study will use qualitative inquiry—including interviews, documents, researcher memos and reflections—to examine what shapes student participation in student equity program development. The goal of the study is to address lack of information about the role of students as program participants in the discourse of equity program development at California community colleges. This contribution supports a broader understanding of student support programs and direct student experiences as an indispensable inclusion in program creation. As educational institutions continue to receive funding to develop and enhance student equity programs, this information will improve the developers, strengthen the development process, and enhance programs for positive impact to student success outcomes.

### **Research Question**

To understand the phenomena of student participation in program development, the following research question ask: What factors shape African American students' participation in student equity program development in California community colleges? By answering this question, we will have a greater understanding on how to enhance programs that are developed with nuances for today's African American students, meeting their dynamic needs as they advance towards student success in equity programs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study will focus on African American students' experiences and their role as program participants within two-year community college setting. I examined these phenomena within the context of student equity programs using qualitative research methods. Using the problem statement and research questions as a guide, I examined the

following domains, African American student experiences in higher education, specifically, community colleges, student involvement and institutional decision-making process. Based on the review of literature, I used lenses of validation theory and shared governance framework to investigate the current condition of study's participants. An important policy that addresses this study is definition of success in student equity programs as defined by the California Community College Chancellor's Office.

### **Overview of the Methodology**

To better understand how student participation impact program development process, I used grounded theory case study design. The purpose of grounded theory is to inductively generate theory that is grounded in, or emerges from, the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Using an iterative process, data collected will be analyzed for categories and themes, for the development of logical patterns that will lead to theory. This study generates student involvement theory relevant to program development process.

This study was conducted at Douglass Community College (DCC), a mid-size urban community college with a diverse student population. DCC was awarded funding from approved Student Equity Plan by the California Community College Chancellor's Office for development of programs directed at Disproportionately Impacted (DI) students, those with high achievement gaps in comparison to their peers. From these groups, I used stratified random sampling to recruit and interview African American students who are participants in the Impacted Learners Program (ILP). Faculty members and program coordinators who facilitate program structure and process were also recruited for the study. For inclusion in study, participants completed at least one semester as a learner, planner, or coordinator with ILP. Participants were provided with a

formal invitation to participate in the study by email. An informed consent form and interview protocol was used to conduct each interview.

I conducted a semi- structured interviews in person at the location of participants choosing to give a sense of comfort. Interviews lasted approximately an hour. Follow up interviews was needed as interview protocol continue to be refined with data collection and analysis for an in-depth understanding of phenomena to capture emerging hypothesis. In addition to interviews, documents such as program meetings minutes were reviewed and used. I will also reviewed student equity committee minutes, from these meetings, I glean the level of students' participation and their influence in the decision-making process by the committee.

The protection of participants' privacy and data was accounted for throughout the process. Participants were informed of their rights to stop the interview process at anytime. Collected data were stored in password-protected computer. This study's identifiers for participants and location was given pseudonyms. All data to be destroyed from storage at end of study.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The focus of this study is on African American students' participation within a mid-size community college campus environment with predominantly non-black institution in a large urban setting. There is possibility that a similar study performed using students of different racial demographic would produce different results. Student equity is present at institutions of all types, so outcome in similar study will change depending on the institutional type. Also, a similar study at institutions with predominantly African American student body can also expect results with a different

outcome. Student equity is addressed at various institutions depending on the following factors: DI population, level of student participation in shared governance and academic senate collaboration with other campus constituency. The focus into student participation is isolated to program development within student equity; therefore, the general application of student participation into larger institutional decision-making will require additional study. Lastly, rather than focus on student's perspective alone to develop theory, the study also examines perspectives of those in non-student roles— faculty and coordinators—for a more holistic view of factors affecting student participation.

### **Organization of Dissertation**

This study is an examination of the factors that affect student participation within student equity programs. In Chapter 1, I begin with putting the study in context of student equity and general experience of African American students in higher education and student involvement. This chapter should give the reader a sense of ongoing discussion that this study will contribute to lack of information or gaps in literature and in practice. A brief methodology and theoretical framework(s) are provided.

Chapter 2 focuses on the literature review, providing more in-depth account of African American student experiences and history of student involvement in institutional decision-making process. This will help readers understand the current perspectives on student participation. It will also provide broad understanding and specific level of student participation within student equity programs with implication on institutional policies.

Chapter 3 takes a closer look at the study's methodology, including information on research tradition, setting, sample procedures, research instruments, data collection,

data analysis, and my role as the researcher. This chapter will help identify the parameters of the study and provide validity for the transferability of its findings.

Chapter 4 introduces the qualitative results of the study, I provide the results of the study, including direct quotes from program participants and staff from the interviews. This chapter captures the students and staff in their own voice and bring to life their lived experiences. This chapter provides the foundation for discussion in the next chapter.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the results in context of the literature and conceptual frameworks. I connect student voice to factors the affect student participation through the lens of validation theory and shared governance model. I conclude by providing recommendations for future research and practice,

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The purpose of this ground theory case study is to explain factors that shape African American students' active participation in community college student equity program development. The problem that this study examines is the lack of information on active participation of African American students during student equity program development in community colleges. Further, the problem extends beyond the immediate contexts of student equity program development, it explores African American student preparation to participate in policymaking and institutional decision-making in student equity programs. I will examine African American community college students' experiences with a focus on campus climate, classroom interaction with faculty, student involvement out of classroom, and socialization on campus as a function of their participation in student equity program development.

In this review of the literature, I discuss African American student experiences in college, detailing campus climate and interaction with faculty with a specific look at African American community college students. I also discuss the state of California student equity and development of student equity programs with examples of current institutional approaches to program creation. Further, I discuss literature on shared governance related to approaches used in student equity program development. Finally, I introduce validation theory and shared governance model as my theoretical framework that will guide this study and connect it with empirical literature.

### **African American Students' Experiences in College**

African American students' college experiences are characterized by insurmountable complexities. In comparison to their counterparts, black students have

lower persistence rates, lower academic achievement levels, less likelihood of enrollment in advanced degree program, poorer psychosocial adjustments, lower graduation rates, and lower post-graduation occupational attainments and earning (Fleming, 1984; Allen, 1985; Porter, 1990). Literature of higher learning have planned and implemented programs intended to enhance African American students experience into one that can improve retention, persistence, and completion rates (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2011; Guiffrida, 2005; Kuh, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000). However, program development for the retention of black students continues to be elusive for many institution of higher learning (Harper, 2012; Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012).

A myriad of factors remain as hindrances for African American students from actualizing similar experiences as their counterparts in adaptation to college life. According to Pounds (1987), Black students, like other students, desire to understand how to make friends, learn about the college environment, and make the transition away from home. As they prepare to embark on one of the important journey in their educational life, these students are besieged with navigating factors that include hostile campus climate, perception of an inflexible institutional culture, alienation, and a yearning for supportive student-faculty interaction while prioritizing daily course work. These developmental concerns can present unique challenges for black students if they perceive little within their environment allows them to experience a sense of belonging- an essential component for social adjustment (p. 23 ).

**Campus climate for African American students.** In an era of growing institutional competition for students and funding, an institutional image reflecting a positive culture and campus climate, are few key dimensions often sought (Peterson &

Spencer, 1990). For African American students enrolled at predominately white colleges, many have yet to find a positive experience. In her report, Hurtado (1992) asserts, when compared to their white peers, African American students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) are more likely to develop perceptions of a racially hostile climate on campus. Two decades later, Baber echoed a similar concern supported by research that black students were most likely to perceive a hostile racial climate (Baber, 2012). Continual exposure to a hostile education climate, marked by racial tension and stereotyping, may adversely influence the academic achievement and psychological health of students of color (Ancis et al., 2000).

The result of African American students' transition into an institutional culture in which they are underrepresented and underprepared results in psychosocial challenges from institutions they long to be part of. The ratio of black to white students is low on many campuses, and this low visibility may contribute to students' feelings of isolation, alienation, and lack of trust (Baber 2012). African American students frequently find that their connection to their campus community erode to levels that further aggravates hostility towards them when their experience is minimized to placate the status quo. Ancis et al., points out that, denial of minimization of racism may create additional stress for students of color who often have limited outlets for valid expressions of frustration (p. 183). Further, behavior derived from lack of validation is perceived as microaggression, insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) endured by black students from interaction by those they hoped to form a connection. Regrettably, African American students turn to other blacks for social interaction instead of to white peers or

student services (p. 544). It is under these condition that African American students develop what Baber (2012) called Racial Regard Resiliency, a student resistance against perceptions or experiences with one-dimensional judgments of racial identity (Pg. 74). Black students ability to recognize the underlying inequity derived from judgment of their identity, give power to their voice for effective change.

*African American students' experiences at community colleges.* African American students enroll in all types of Universities, with 39 percent enrolling in public two-year colleges (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2010), the largest sector outside Historical Black Universities and Colleges (HBCU). Between 2012 and 2023, undergraduate enrollment at 2-year institutions is projected to increase by 16 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). The average increase projected for public institutions of higher education is a dramatic growth change that community colleges may not be prepared for. Blalock (1967) hypothesized that as the percentage of students of color increases, we would expect to find increasing discriminatory behavior, because more members of the minoritized group will be in direct competition with someone from the dominant group.

With a mission of open access coupled with low cost, community colleges became a de-facto choice for African Americans in pursuit of higher education. In the fall of 2014, 52% of African American students were represented among undergraduate students at community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016). However, Cuyjet (1998) points out in order to overcome feelings of isolation, students of color need to feel welcomed on the campus in activities, programs, and services. Unfortunately, for African American students who choose to attend PWI, they continue

to perceive their presence at these institutions as unwelcomed. Ethnic studies proponents argued that, these students social and academic success at predominantly white schools is related to the institution lack of connectedness to African American culture (Fleming, 1981, 1984). Lett and Wright (2003) observed that African American students feeling of non-acceptance can be attributed to, the offices of Student Affairs lack of diversity, in terms of Administrators, counselors, mentors or role models. As institutions began to heed the call for diversity in their campus community, the rate of attrition for African American student actually increased. Despite the proliferation of diversity programs, African-American students continue to report, at a higher rate than both white students and other populations of students of color, “guarded, tense, and threatening” interactions with other students and faculty (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2010).

**Student-faculty interaction for African American students.** By design, community colleges are often commuter schools that offer little to no housing for students. Students spend less time on campus to understand their environment decreasing their opportunity for interaction, both formal and informal with agents of institutional socialization such as peers, administrators and faculty. For African American students, a symbiotic relationship exists between having a rich sense of belonging in the classroom for a fulfilling educational experience and extraordinary interaction with faculty. Booker (2007) argued that students who take part in the classroom setting enthusiastically often report higher levels of belongingness and increased motivation and achievement. How students achieve a sense of belongingness in the classroom vastly depends on the nature of interaction with faculty and peers. For African American students, their greatest connection is achieved when they are allowed to express ideas and opinions (Booker,

2007). With high levels of engagement in the classroom, students become comfortable with the classroom environment leading to better performance. However, colleges have structured educational experiences in a manner that places African-American students in need of the greatest level of support in classes with faculty who often provide the least level of support (Harris III et. al, 2017). Well-meaning but naive faculty and staff often treat blacks, regardless of whether they are first- or second-generation, in terms of past socialization, rather than recognizing their potential for new learning and re-socialization (Pounds, 1987). In turn, black students perceive unfair classroom treatment as hostile and become disconnected from the classroom and direct the energy into out-of classroom activities.

### **African American Student Involvement**

Student involvement is touted by higher education researchers as a major indicator to student success and retention. In his seminal work on student involvement theory, Astin (1984) postulated that effectiveness of student learning and educational policy and practice in the educational setting can largely be attributed to student engagement. Tinto (1993) similarly echoed the importance of student integration with institution, that varying degrees, some form of both academic and social integration were necessary for retention. Clearly, all students' participation in the institutional environment is an asset to colleges.

For African American students who face exclusion from main stream institutional culture, student activities and organizations tend to favor traditional students who come from families where the precedent of attending college is well established (Rendon, 1994). For black students, lacking guidance in preparation to understand nuances in the

college environment become deleterious to their success. African American student participation became crucial for validating their own identity on campus as students struggle to assimilate and maintain a strong cultural connection (Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). As African American students gravitate towards each other because of similar shared experiences, they form student organizations that provide students with an outlet to discuss their experiences and frustrations of being a minoritized group (Guiffrida, 2003).

Critics of student involvement see formation of black student organizations as a hindrance to student academic endeavor. Fleming (1984) noted that involvement in African American organization can divert African American students from academics. As students invest more time into student organization less time is spent on core purpose of why they came to college. Others contend that participation in student organization creates isolation from peers (Guiffrida, 2004), a detriment for African American students to gaining opportunities that would improve networking. A key component often attributed to student success while attending college and after graduation. However, black students seek out student organizations like student government or student clubs for opportunities that offer camaraderie with peers, faculty and staff intended to bolster their sense of belonging.

**African American student involvement at community colleges.** At community colleges, student involvement is far more difficult. Community colleges are places where the involvement of both faculty and students seems to be minimal (Astin, 1984). Some of the factors for the scant involvement is that community colleges are branded as commuter schools, where a majority of students enroll in part-time status and academic work

competes with other external responsibilities, increased reliance on adjunct faculty and time constraint for both students and part-time faculty to invest in campus life.

Community colleges, the de-facto college of choice for African Americans students, are often perceived as commuter school due to their lack of housing for students. In 2010, national report on community college housing found that, 116 community colleges in towns offered students housing, compared to 95 schools in rural areas, 43 schools in cities and 6 schools in suburban areas, (American Association of Community Colleges). Frequently, community college students approach their journey to campus in narrow streams of activities that are generally academically related, like attending classes, rather than a more holistic approach that involves participation in student life.

The academic experiences of African American students in community colleges is enacted as a bifurcated existence as they balance competing priorities between classes and life responsibilities. In fact, 62% of students enrolled at community college are enrolled in part-time status, and of all students 70% are employed either full or part time (American Association of Community Colleges, 2017). For African American students, one could assume that part-time attendance leads to potentially longer time attending an institution to build network, but off campus work to meet other responsibilities becomes additional hindrance to socialize and actively engage with peers and faculty.

Meaningful socialization requires strong interaction between African American students and faculty. However, the heavy reliance on part-time or adjunct faculty at community colleges may impede the development of these meaningful relationships and opportunities for substantive interaction. According to Jacoby (2006), the pattern is

particularly pronounced at community colleges, where part-time faculty provide virtually half of all instruction. Student will interact with part-time faculty member in the classroom but find that faculty members are unavailable to deepen the interaction initiated in the classroom. Regrettably, the nature of their contract prevents the opportunity for students-faculty out of classroom exchange. There are little incentives for adjunct faculty to invest at the level that full time faculty can. Additionally, part-time faculty may lack phones, offices, mailboxes, computers, and other basic equipment to conduct their work, undermining their ability to meet with and advise students (Benjamin, 2002).

### **Student Services Program Development Process in Community Colleges**

Development of student services support programs at community colleges are derivatives of the following: reactionary initiatives from an institution to address an issue, outcome driven initiatives with objectives defined by funder, optimistic belief that transference of an external program will yield similar institutional results, and legislative mandates that directly intends to support student success. Community college program development are subjected to shared governance process, because collegial governance was defined, mandated, and established as a minimum condition for receipt of state funds (Collins, 2002). A mechanism for internal stakeholders to participate in planning and practice of institutional programs aimed at student success. Birnbaum explains that, governance is the term we give to the structures and processes that academic institutions invent to achieve an effective balance between the claims of two [or more] different, but equally valid, systems for organizational control and influence (2004).

At community colleges, administrators, faculty, staff, and student representatives form committees for discussion to influence each other towards recommendation and important decision making for institutional direction on policies and practice that ultimately impact students. The democratic ideal of shared governance is a noble one at first view. However, under this shared governance system, unequal share of power generally exists for students, which undermines work to support their development. The importance of this pattern was underscored by Lind and Tyler (1992); namely, that people are concerned about their status in groups because high status within a valued group validates their own self-identity. Perceptions of self-worth and perceptions of fairness are related; when one feels valued, one is also more likely to believe that the group is functioning effectively and fairly (Birnbaum, 2004).

For student participants at community colleges, shared governance groups function ineffectively. The disproportionate distribution of power is likely to lead students to accept the notion that administrators, faculty, and staff are architects of educational policies and practice that shape their experience. Instead, students should help shape rather than simply be shaped by educational policies and practices (Cook-Sather 2003). The call for students to have equal agency in shared governance process to effect change in policy and practice was promulgated by supporters who sought to address equity challenges for all students at California community colleges.

### **Student Equity Programs in Community Colleges**

In 2014, California community colleges received positively surprising news after years of cutbacks from the recession of 2008. With much fanfare, California Governor Jerry Brown proposed a funding of over \$100 million in Student Equity (Community

College League of California) to community colleges. With approval of Student Equity Plan (SEP), institutions were allocated funding to develop or enhance existing programs that aim to close achievement gaps for Disproportionally Impacted (DI) student population described in the plan. As programs took shape, students' active input reverted to the proverbial silent corners of the institution. Institutional authorities' eagerness to develop programs from newly awarded student equity resources summoned for only structural student participation in the planning process.

Over the last three fiscal years, the state of California provided over \$380 million for the implementation of programs based on equity plans in its community colleges. However, for African American students, the retention and persistence rate continue to reach crisis point. In 2017, a collaboration between Center for Urban Education (CUE) and Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL) generated a landscape analysis report on Student Equity Plans and practice for 42 community colleges across California. The findings elucidated both challenges with the current approach to program development intended to mend attrition among black students and innovative approach that is promising for practice. Unfortunately, there was mention of one functional student participation in program development: students were to develop mentoring programs for other males of color, including high school students (Harris III et. al, 2017). Although the importance of structural student participation was acknowledged, the research was shallow with student functional participation in all aspect of plan development. Program development practice that has an impact on closing achievement gaps are crucial to the changing educational climate where students demand, that their voices and histories be

openly recognized, so new opportunities for self-efficacy can emerge (Beebe et al., 2010).

**Community college student equity program development.** Student equity programs are developed at California community colleges with submission of request for proposal (RFP) by any member of a campus constituency to a steering committee that approve and make recommendations to college executives for formal consent to implement planned activities. The composition of the steering committee is represented by stakeholders that provide knowledge and expertise about targeted DI group(s) and/or in a position to anticipate the broad institutional impact of a program creation. However, examples of programs developed, implemented and funded in California show that decision making was reached by input from administrators, staff and faculty without active student voice.

In one example of a program created at Los Angeles Mission College in Sylmar, California, to address equity gaps in access for men of color, the institution targeted previously incarcerated men of color who fall into the DI group indicated in the institution's SEP. The institution developed outreach materials and specified correctional facilities for recruiting activities. The student equity committee with power to recommend projects to campus executives for final approval were composed of faculty, staff, and administrators. Discussion and decision making was carried out without student contribution on the impact that such a program would have on the campus committee.

In another example, the program development approach at Fresno Community College in Fresno, California (FCC) did not fair better. The institution's goal to improve course completion for African American men established Strengthening Young Men by

Academic Achievement (SYMBAA) program. The program is designed to coordinate academic courses and student support for this DI group. The RFP submitted was to expand the program to serve a larger student group. The composition of the membership of student equity committee at FCC did not include student representatives in order to include student voice in the discussion and recommendation. However, at Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, California, there was slight improvement in its committee composition. Here, the student equity committee approved course completion activities with a First-Year Experience (FYE) program to create leadership development opportunities for men of color. Although the majority of committee members were staff, faculty, and administrators, the committee included a student representative in the group.

Many institutions have approached disproportionate impact (both historically and contemporarily) by enacting interventions that target students (e.g., mentoring programs, student clubs) rather than building the institutional capacity that is necessary to redress the myriad of practices and campus climate issues that systematically inhibit student success (Bensimon, 2007). To ameliorate achievement gaps, institutions must look to beneficiaries of designed programs for sustainable interventions that removes impediments to power sharing. Student inclusion cannot be mere documentation of the presence of student representatives, institutional powers must provide the platform that prepare students from maintaining passive role in decision making.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As a lens to understand factors that shape African American students' active participation in community college student equity program development, I will use a bi-theoretical lens. Specifically, I will use Birnbaum's governance model to explore

structural vs. functional participation in community college student equity program development and Rendón's theory of validation. Below, I discuss the respective theoretical models and their unique contribution to this study.

### **Structural Participation vs. Functional Participation in Program Development**

To understand the importance of decision making and its impact on students' work to achieve parity, the process of shared governance must be dissected. For California's community colleges, shared governance must be established as a minimum condition for receipt of state funds (Collins, 2002). Birnbaum classified governance into two categories. First, hard governance refers to the structures, regulations, and systems of sanctions that define authority relationships. This I will call structural participation. The inclusion of student participants to serve the structural facets of shared governance. In the process of structural participation, student inclusion are documented as participants in committees and recognized as having certified status as decision making stakeholders. They are provided the opportunity to include topics or issues or New Business to the agenda as it relates to the business of the committee. Minutes of previous meetings are made available for review to understand Old Business that include discussion and final outcome of an issue. All representative votes are counted and accepted as legitimate understanding and acceptance by all constituents.

By contrast, Birnbaum described soft governance as interactional or "systems of social connections and interactions...". This I will refer to as functional participation. Student participation on this level can be viewed through committee minutes, participation in committees, sub-group, or taskforce. Representatives engage with other constituent representatives as equals in dialogue, advancing their respective perspectives

as collaborators to ideas that advance program development. Seeing themselves as substantive contributors to programs of value to the college enhances students' confidence and sense of purpose (Cohen et al., 2013). Yet, it is rare, outside of education departments, for faculty and students to engage as equal partners in substantive let alone sustained dialogue about the processes of teaching and learning in which they both participate (Cook-Sather, 2014). Lack of student representative preparation for shared governance process in combination with faculty tendency to work in "pedagogical solitude": This is the norm according to which faculty tend to plan, teach, and assess [students'] work alone (Shulman, 1993), erodes student functional participation that result in students sense of apathy.

### **Validation Theory**

To understand the nature of African American student participation in student equity program development, I will utilize validation theory, which draws from literature on Astin's (1985) theory of involvement and feminist researcher Belenky's (1986), on women that felt powerless and voiceless. Rendón (1994) conceived of a construct of validation to voice issues of low-income, first-generation, and non-traditional college students. Validation refers to the intentional, proactive affirmation of students in and out of class agents (p. 12). It was offered as a new theory for how students might find success in college for those who found difficulty in involvement, with past experience of invalidation or doubts about ability to succeed in college. The focus of validation theory is two-fold: to validate students as creators of knowledge and as valuable members of the college learning community and to foster personal development and social adjustment (Linares & Muñoz, 2011).

According to Rendón (1994), validation theory offers six elements: (a) initiating contact with students, (b) presence of validation, (c) validation as prerequisite for student development, (d) validation occurs in and out of class, (e) validation is means to an end over time, (f) early application is critical. Validation theory have been used as framework and to develop student development theory. However, researcher's use of the model in student decision making is scant in the context of institutional governance process. For this study, I will use validation theory to guide my understanding of African American students' experiences in the decision making process as validating agents to establish a pathway for students' sense of belonging that will reach functional levels in the program development and participation process.

### **Summary of the Literature and Statement of the Research Problem**

Student equity programs are designed to support African American students academic outcomes from institutional climate that affects their psychosocial adjustments, faculty interactions that reveal judgment of their race or class, and campus involvement that silence their participation with detriment to their academic performance. On many campuses, these students are classified into Disproportionally Impacted (DI) groups for one or more indicators under student equity criteria. As program development under student equity take shape, students find themselves as passive consumer of inefficacious programs without the power to effect change. Yet, shared governance approach to student equity planning and implementation encourage the crucial active participation of students. Although, structural student inclusion is documented in many institution's Student Equity Plans, student active participation on par with staff, faculty and administrators is required for students to comprehend planning process, broad policy

issues and external knowledge expertise they offer for a robust program development. This study will engage in qualitative approach with use of case study grounded theory methods, to understand what factors prevent African American students from actively participating in the program development process with the research question: What factors affect African American students' participation within student equity program development

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Purpose and Question**

The purpose of this study is to examine students' participation in the development of a community college student equity program. I used qualitative inquiry that include interviews and document data. The goal of the study was to address gaps in information about the role of students who are program participants in the development of equity programs at community colleges. This study contributes to a broader understanding of student roles in the creation and growth of support programs that provide direct student experiences. As community colleges receive funding to develop student equity programs, information obtained will improve developers, strengthen the development process, enhance programs and ultimately impact student outcomes. To understand the phenomena of student participation in program development, the following research question will guide this study. What factors shape African American students' participation in student equity program development in California community colleges?

### **Chapter Organization**

This chapter will review the design and methods for this study, providing a methodological and procedural framework to gather and make sense of the information. I explained why using a grounded theory lens in this research study is most appropriately employed in studies where little is known about the phenomenon (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016, p. 49). I discussed in detail how using this research tradition reinforces an exploration of students participation experiences in program development. I discussed why research site was chosen for study. This grounded theory case study focused on the Impacted Learners program at the study site. I provided detail for the use of purposeful

sampling in this study and criterion for selection of participants. I detailed the data collection procedures and explained why a particular method was chosen. Lastly, this chapter will close with method of analysis and discussion of the researcher's role.

### **Research Approach**

This study examined factors affecting students' participation in student equity program development from a qualitative perspective. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), Qualitative research is suited to promoting a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participant (p. 38). Qualitative inquiry also generally focuses on process theory, which tends to see the world in people, situations, events, and the processes that connect these (Maxwell, 2013). By gathering data from participants on their experiences, I gleaned an intimate description and interpretation of this phenomenon. I studied program participants "...in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of meaning people bring to them" (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016, p. 41).

### **Research Tradition: Grounded Theory**

Within qualitative research traditions, the most fitting framework for this study is grounded theory. Charmaz (2006) aptly stated, by adopting grounded theory methods, you can direct, manage and streamline your data collection and, moreover, construct an original analysis of your data. To develop a theory that explained the research question, operationalizing data from participants is crucial for an authentic exposition. The iterative nature of grounded theory permits continually correcting data collection process through analysis until saturation. My focus was on students' changing experiences in the program

using grounded theory lens, to inductively generate theory that is grounded in, or emerges from, the data (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016).

Additionally, viewing through the lens of a grounded theory framework provide usefulness in real world application because of its substantive nature. In other words, by capturing content from participants' actions, words, beliefs, and concepts that illustrate understanding of what is happening in "their" world, so program planning processes can exude authenticity.

My interest in the process of program planning and the factors that affect this process is from three distinct perspectives: students, faculty, and coordinators or managers. The difficulty of understanding student participation level in program creation requires an inherent process embedded in the research situation that is likely to be explicated by grounded theory methods (Birks & Mills, 2011). To explain factors that affect student participation, there are many layers of both interactional and transactional exchanges within the research that must be investigated. Therefore, grounded theory is particularly useful for addressing questions about process; that is how something changes over time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In order to achieve theoretical sampling from initial data collection, I pursued clues that arise during analysis in a grounded theory approach (Birks & Mills, 2011). With grounded theory methods, you shape and reshape your data collection and, therefore, refine your collected data (Charmaz, 2006). The sophisticated nature of data collection from participants that are part of the Impacted Learners Program led to further investigation that was clarified in the analytical process and had potential to change directions in the study.

Another important use of grounded theory is to achieve theoretical sensitivity. Birks & Mills (2011) warned that theoretical sensitivity is instrumental to the development of grounded theory and not fully embracing it in the study will result in a shallow product (p. 58). To discover important attributes to explain the research question, it was critical that I inspected prior knowledge before undertaking the study to be conscious of relevant data and categories that arise from data collection. This ultimately increased my level of awareness to improve data collection instrument such as the general interview guide.

### **Case Study Design**

For emergent theory to surface in grounded theory framework, I conducted a case study. A case study is a research strategy, an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observation of educational phenomena (Merriam, 2011). Case study methods work well for this study because they are used to understand complex social phenomena. Additionally, case studies tend to focus on contemporary rather than historical issues, which makes it a good choice for this study. Lastly, with presentation of evidence, case study allows for consideration of alternative analysis. With all accounts, using case study as a method of data collection is essential to achieve theoretical sampling that gave rise to emergent theory in this study.

The use of case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 1984). The nature of this study is to explain factors that affect student participation from the perspective of students and staff in the research setting. The choice of instrumental case study is to gain a general understanding and to get insight to the research question by studying a particular case (Stake, 1995).

Case study from this approach "...offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education" (Merriam, 1988, p. 3).

I conducted a grounded theory case study of the Impacted Learners Program (ILP) at Douglass Community College (pseudonym), to provide an in-depth picture of the unit of study (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016). I used stratified random sampling to select program participants to gain, information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (p. 148). Students, faculty and coordinators responses from interviews, in combination with document and archival data, yielded in-depth explanation to fully understand this phenomena within the student equity program. This strategy also provided access to data that focuses on answer to the research question, what factors shape African American students' participation in student equity program development in California community colleges? (p. 148).

### **Research Setting and Context**

In 2015-16 school year, Douglass Community College student enrollment was over 29,000 in which 22,000 were credit student. Part-time students made up over 60% of the enrollment while full-timers were above 30% of student population. Over 50% of DCC students were female. Majority age group of students were 20 and under, while the next largest age group is 21-25. There are two large ethnic groups at DCC that make up 60% of the student body. Majority of students are either citizens or residents of the US. Majority of students enroll between 6 to 11 units. DCC demographic makeup could be explained as a microcosm of the city of Douglass.

DCC resides in a city with a large population density of one of the major groups at the institution. The number of Latino students at DCC is fairly large in comparison to

Latinos represented in city of Douglass. 31% of student population are Latinos while only 16% Latinos are represented in the city. The influx of Latino/a student population at DCC are drawn from larger surrounding urban cities around Douglass.

An obscure historical number of African Americans live in Douglas. For example, in 1994, while forming a human relations panel for the city, “Douglass included no African Americans on a new human relations panel formed this year, an especially regrettable omission considering its history of race relations” (Douglass Times, 2006). Yet, census for the city of Douglass continued to record the presence of African Americans living there. Racial disparity among some ethnic groups in Douglass mirrors the institution. Demographically, the faculty-student ratio at DCC for students of color is an example of alarming inequity, partly because faculty of color, whom students hope to see, are not adequately represented at DCC. Based on institutional profile descriptions, there were two Caucasian instructors for every white student, contrasted by one Latino/a instructor for 2 Latino/a students and an even more dismal ratio for African American students. African-American employees classified as faculty are either counselors or administrators whose interaction with students are often outside of the classroom.

### **Program Setting: Impacted Learners Program (ILP)**

Recent demographic shifts of the student body from a white majority to fifty percent representation by students of color is a cause to address the changing needs of the student body towards equity at DCC. In the Spring 2014, DCC hired its first student equity coordinator commissioned to write an official student equity plan (SEP) for approval by the state Chancellors Office. Identified among its groups of disproportionately impacted student were African American males. Approval of the SEP

by the CCCCCO moved DCC forward to hire a coordinator for the Impacted Learners Program in June 2014 to attract and recruit African American students into the program.

The Impacted Learners Program was conceptualized by institutional leaders who were motivated by the need for change and support for its DI students with approval of funding for the college's Student Equity Plan (SEP) by the state's Chancellor's Office. This individual's chief aim is to oversee development, recruitment and maintenance of program objectives towards proposed outcomes. In Fall 2014, program development involved coordinator's research into similar programs like EOPS, Emoja, Ujima, My Brother's Keeper and attending conferences on programs directed towards African American student population. Institutional leaders provided feedback on changes to development while program coordinator sought support when necessary. During the process, students' feedback or input was not sought during the program development process. This example of the institution's approach at program development illustrate a campus climate where African American students have underdeveloped sense of belonging that begs to heed the warning, "...administrators need to be aware of the social isolation and alienation within this environment" (Littleton, 2003, p. 85).

According to DCC Student Equity Plan, the purpose of ILP is to improve achievement gaps that has severely disproportionately impacted African American students, mostly males, in comparison to their peers (2015). These gaps are determined by set goals for rate improvement in transfer, graduation, retention and success. The program has an estimated number of 70 African-American students in contract with ILP. As one of DCC's learning communities, ILP has a designated counselor/coordinator. There are additional counselors who serve in the role of coordinator for programs such as

Summer Bridge that provide activities to incoming students over the summer to acclimate them to college life. These activities include tutoring, mentoring, workshops, cultural events, and field trips. Additionally, support services are provided to students in the form of a \$50-dollar meal voucher, transportation cards, emergency funds and book allotment. Monthly meetings take place for students to meet with counselors and coordinators for program updates.

I have well-established relationships with colleagues who serve in managing capacities to oversee equity programs from my formal employment at the institution. In fact, my relationship with these gatekeepers in combination with formal knowledge by the office of the Vice President of Student Services and Department of Research and Planning will ensure access to documentations and program participants for this study. My main point of contact is the program manager, Jennifer Hammond (pseudonym) for student equity programs. Jennifer is responsible for the budgetary component, hiring of coordinators for individual programs and the liaison between student equity committee and program coordinators. Adjunct counselors serve in the role of coordinators for individual programs while also serving as advisors to students under student equity. I am acquainted with the coordinator for the Impacted Learners Program with the assistance of the Vice-President of Student Services, the top official that supervises all student support programs. In the explanation of my study, I solicited support for access to students, faculty and coordinators from these key role players for the duration of this study.

### **Sampling Strategy**

I conducted purposeful sampling in this study by selecting program participants in Impacted Learners Program, faculty that coordinate activities for participants and

program coordinators/counselors to gain, information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016, p. 148). I used a combination of two purposeful sampling strategies: stratified random sampling and theoretical sampling for this study. I will begin the study with stratified random sampling because of “availability of site or respondents...” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 98). I also employed theoretical sampling as I collect data to lead me to the next data source to collect because this study is an evolving process guided by an emerging theory (p. 99).

I recruited students, faculty, and coordinator for interviews. The students in the program are African American, this applies to current program participants. The student group are combination of full-timers, part-timers, student-athletes, and those returning back to school after years of departure. Most of the students received financial aid and qualify for additional support programs. Students had at least one full completed semester verified by transcript and program participation while attending to be selected for study. The Impacted Learners Program consist of over 70 student participants. I selected 13 student participants for interview, 7 women and 6 men, with possible follow up questions for clarity. I selected 7 staff members in the role of coordinator or advisor who worked with cohort of ILP students in the Summer or Winter intersession or full 16-week semesters. I conducted interviews with program coordinators in student equity including lead coordinator for Impacted Learners program in this study. These criteria are necessary for students, staff and coordinators to provide detailed program experiences. Participants responses from interviews yield an in-depth information to fully understand this phenomena within student equity programs.

## **Research Participant Protections**

All research data will be stored on a computer that is password protected. The audio recordings will be transcribed and deleted at the end of data collection. I will hire a transcriptionist for transcribing the interview so I can spend more time on the analysis. The transcriber will be instructed to highlight unfamiliar terminologies and phrases that seem out of context. The transcriber will not be familiar with the interview, therefore, while transcribing there may be a gap between the recording and transcription. I plan to check the transcription against the recording to fill in gaps that transcriptionist may have missed. All of the identifiable data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office and all of the de-identifiable data will be stored on a password-protected laptop. The audio recordings will also be stored initially in a password protected laptop but then transcribed and destroyed as soon as possible.

## **Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

The purpose of this study is to explore factors that affect African American students' participation in program development within student equity. As with any form of research, however, aligning grounded theory methods to only one type of data limits the potential of a study to achieve its aim (Birks & Mills, 2011). To fully understand this phenomenon, the topic will be explored from three different perspectives. First, I conducted interviews with students that are program participants in the Impacted Learners Program (ILP) at the research site (Douglass Community College) to understand their perspective. I also conducted interviews with faculty members who coordinated activities in ILP to understand how the faculty-student dynamics answers research question. Responses from faculty can either corroborate students' perspective about

participation or provide new insight to factors that affect student participation. Lastly, I conducted interview with program coordinators to understand what is happening at the programmatic level. My interview with coordinators to capture insight from their knowledge of the inner workings of the institution when planning and prevailing attitude during program construction. I sent invitations to participants by email, provide informed consent form prior to interview and an interview protocol. I conducted 45 to 60 minute-interviews that took place at convenient times and locations for respondents and I allowed for additional time for follow up questions.

### **Research Invitations**

I began my recruiting process by sending invitation to individuals from the list of program participants in ILP who met the research criteria by email. In the invitation, I included the topic and purpose of the research. I also added detailed information of data protection procedures. An email address was provided to participants to respond to researcher to set up time for interview.

### **Informed Consent Form**

The informed consent detailed the processes for collecting, maintaining, and protecting data gathered from the participants. The consent included information about the nature of the interview and possible discomfort that may arise as a result of discussing personal matter related to participation. The informed consent form reminded the participants of their rights, including the right to review material, to remain anonymous, and the right to discontinue participation at any time. For this study, all personal information were kept private and any identifiable data was removed immediately following the data collection process.

## **Interview Protocols**

To guide the data collection process, a semi-structured interview protocol was employed. Data collection included two set of interview protocol that are linked to research question for both pools of participants that include students, faculty and coordinator. While protocol tool was used consistently to guide the interviews, natural inquiry and spontaneous data collection occurred depending on the participant's response. Questions were open-ended allowing participant to interpret and respond based on their interpretation. I followed up with prompts when necessary to clarify or gain in-depth meaning to participants' answers.

The faculty/coordinator participants protocol started with general questions like name, gender, teaching status and area of discipline. I asked questions about faculty member attitude and relationship with program participants. I delved deeper into understanding previous questions by asking question within the context of student in and out of classroom experience. I also asked about the program development process, who were the role players, how are students engaged to be part of the process.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

I sent an email notifying study participants of an opportunity to communicate their experience while involved with Impacted Learners program. These participants were provided options to respond by essay to interview or follow-up questions.

Participants were compensated with a \$10 gift card for their response after the study. All participants of the study were protected and their participation was strictly voluntary.

## **Interviews**

The focus of this study is to examine factors that affect student participation in program development. The primary source of data collection was semi-structured, personal interviews with community college students, faculty and program coordinators that work with Impacted Learners Program. Identified and confirmed participants were scheduled for interview in location that was convenient and reliable. Prior to start of interview, participants reviewed and signed informed consent form and they were provided brief introduction to the purpose of the study. Interviews were approximately 45-60 minutes in length and participants were informed of the potential for a follow up interview or questions via email or phone.

I recorded interviews using a digital recorder and an iPhone. These recordings were stored on a password protected, non-mobile computer until transcription and analysis was completed. Transcription took place within five days of each interview. In effort to mitigate researcher effects on the data, participants were sent a copy of the transcription for member-check. Participants were asked to read my interpretation of their comments from the transcripts and verify for spelling or phrases that need adjustments to ensure if it captures their experience. Participants had the option to offer additional information that was not initially offered. Following the member-check, I included all edits and changes requested by the participants. All participants were assigned a pseudonym or code. Once transcription was completed all identifiable data, including the audio recordings and code list were permanently deleted, including all backup data, sent emails, and paper and digital copies.

Using these data, the interviews were transcribed. A combination of paid transcription and self-transcription were used. I provided specific instructions via

protocol to hired transcribers, this protocol included ways of conveying emotion and format guidelines. To proof the transcriptions, I read the transcriptions while listening to the audio files. I also member check the transcriptions and included edits from the member checking process. Simultaneously, while interviewing and transcribing, I collected secondary sources of data, such as field notes, meeting agendas and institutional information. I also kept a reflective journal that recoded my thoughts and reactions to the data collection process. I reviewed this journal with my dissertation chair and peers to facilitate peer review and further reflection. Using this information and process, I created a comprehensive filing and labeling system and organize the data by preliminary codes.

### **Documents and Archival Data**

I collected documents on institution's website—from program records and the Office of Research and Planning to attain a sense of program goals, targets, history and formative programmatic enhancements. I collected records of student equity committee, agenda and minutes for factual occurrences of student participation within this context. Document collection will reflect and show trail of the attitudinal disposition of the institution in regards to student participation in program creation. Collecting document is the least obtrusive approach to studying an environment without the disturbance of a researcher, for things that cannot be observed (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). In addition, data collection will revealed what had taken place prior to the start of the study. I collected archival data to provide historical context of program development at DCC.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

In this grounded theory case study, I used interviews, documents, archival data and field notes as sources. I gathered data using aforementioned sampling approach

mention in the sampling strategy section described earlier. Responses were logged in a secured database.

### **Preliminary Data Analysis**

Using the literature review and data collected, preliminary codes will be created. “Coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspect of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data” (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016, p. 199). The primary data source were student, faculty and coordinator interviews, documents and archival data. Preliminary coding, the first phase of coding, began with creating identification that was assigned to each participants for distinguishing later who said what. In vivo coding was the first coding process that I employed. This coding process involves creating tentative labels with a notation system that is assigned bracketed or highlighted terms of texts, words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs used by participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). To eliminate lag time between data collection and analysis, I kept a data summary table of the research question for each participant. Summary table is a compilation of what participants say and what was recorded with each coding session. The rationale for keeping data summary table was to have evidence of data collection that support findings. In the second phase I conducted focused coding, a process to synthesize and explain larger segments of data (Charmaz, 2006). Large data was sifted through with developed codes to determine if codes are adequate and which are more comprehensive.

### **Thematic Data Analysis**

As themes emerge, I continued to read and re-read my collected data. I took specific time to reflect and meditate on the connections that are being created.

Comprehensive themes and quotes were condensed into codes. Theoretical coding process evolved through the data collection and analysis process. As I read, reflect, and continued to collect I refined codes, applied codes across data files, and developed code families. I used computer-assisted data analysis software, ATLAS.ti, to facilitate the process of data analysis. This software provided an efficient and effective way to categorize and shape the data for emerging patterns.

### **Interpreting**

Using themes, codes, and clusters, as a final step in data analysis I created networks of codes to visually represent the relationships that were found in the data. I examined these relationships for directionality and interaction. I collected more data based on these relationships and used additional interviews to confirm or refine the theory that was emerging. At this point, I revisit the literature to research similar findings. The final step in my data analysis process was to put forth a theory based on my findings, connect this theory to existing literature, and translate this new information into potential policy implications for community colleges.

### **Researcher's Roles**

As the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis, the researcher adopts a flexible stance and is open to change (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016, p. 39). This perspective offers a position of engagement I must bear in mind throughout the study. Naturally, conducting a study with a grounded theory lens means it is an iterative process that requires the researcher to “understand the multiple realities from the perspectives of participants” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016, p. 43). Changes in perspective will require

the researcher to acknowledge personal values, and brings to own experience to bear on the study.

### **Researcher Bias**

As an African-American male that attended community college, my experiences about having a sense of belonging within an institution setting came from my involvement in institutional opportunities where I gained a sense of partnership in institutional decision making on platforms such as student government, student clubs and governance committees. My experience was initiated through the outreach of a college administrator who shared the importance of participating in the college community governance process. I have often wonder without this individual would I have participated. Often opportunities to become an institutional partner in the decision-making process is not as readily accessible or understood by students. For students in equity programs, if not shown the path, it seems unimaginable that they could be impactful in program development. Yet, student equity programs like Impacted Learners is an ideal grassroots platform for students to develop their potential as leaders, gain invaluable critical thinking and practical skills, where they can become change agents that can motivate a campus climate to achieving systemic change. I am seeking in-depth information about the realities of the participants to understand factors that affect students participation within student equity programs.

As an employee at DCC, I am aware of researcher bias inherent in my data collection. My close proximity to the institution, the students, and staff could bias the information. For example, many of the staff interviewed are familiar with my presence of campus in a different role. This may prevent them from disclosing rich details if it leads

to criticism of another colleague that is familiar to me as the researcher. Similarly, African American student participants may have also seen me on campus in my role as an employee of DCC. My engagement with these participants as researcher could become confusing or prevent them from being authentic about their experience.

### **Participant Reactivity**

Some potential limitations of this study may result from participants who are faculty members and advisors that are my colleagues at study site. In my role as a specialist with the instructional division at study site, I am acquainted with many of the faculty and advisors who will serve in the study. My role as researcher may cause unaccounted influences during the interview process. I am also aware of the adjustment of being in the researcher role and participants' adjustment to perceiving me in this role after perhaps recognizing me on campus as staff.

### **Mitigating Strategies**

**Researcher bias.** In order to produce a study that is credible and contribute to the on-going discourse about student participation, I maintained flexibility and utilized member check to avoid personal bias. The goal was to rule out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and perspective they have on what is going on...(Merriam & Tisdale, 2016) My interview questions were designed to be open ended to leave room for the participants to answer in a variety of ways.

**Participants reactivity.** I gave the participant control of the meeting date, time, and location. As an outsider to Impacted Learners Program, issues can arise that affect whether one has access to participants, as well as to the level of in-depth experiences they will share with the researcher (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). I clearly defined the role of the

participant and me as the researcher and the intentions of the study through the reading and signing of the informed consent process.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of my study is to examine factors that affect African American students' participation in the construction of student equity programs at community colleges by using validation and shared governance framework from students and staff experiences. A single research question guided this study: What factors shape African American students' participation in student equity program development in a public urban community college? This question guided data collection and analysis, which I present below.

### **Organization of the Chapter**

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the data collection and analysis procedures and a review of the analytical steps that informed grounded theory research design. I will share descriptive data on my study sample, including the number of student participants and staff participants. I will also share information of student participants such as gender and age. These descriptive details will illustrate the diversity of perspective in my sample and help the reader understand the contexts of the results.

After providing a rich depth of understanding of my data sources and analysis, I will delve into the results of my data collection to provide deeper perspectives from students and staff, informed by validation theory and shared governance model. I will identify several main themes and discuss their interrelatedness. This chapter will present thematic patterns of both community college students and staff participants, highlighting their shared experiences to demonstrate the breadth and depth of the data collected. I

organized summaries and quotes from the perspective of student and staff participants to follow meaningful themes that naturally emerged from participants' responses.

### **Data Analysis**

Grounded theory provides a detailed roadmap for formal data analysis, an inherent and ongoing part of the research and writing process (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016). Several well-defined steps help the researcher explore transcribed interview data in a systematic way and help move the researcher from data analysis to theoretical saturation to eventually an explanatory model firmly grounded in experiences of the study participants.

### **Simultaneous Data Collection and Analysis**

In order to improve the interview protocol, I conducted a pilot focus group with a small sample size from the student population in focus. The focus group allowed me to identify the interview questions that will potentially address issues students currently experience at their institution. In grounded theory, one of the fundamental principles is the simultaneous process of data collection and analysis. Here, concurrent data collection and analysis lead to categories, with patterned themes as an overall objective of this approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While collecting data, I started to review interview transcripts that were sent to participants for member check to create interval validity, a process by which participants validate interview content captured during the interview session. The single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on (Maxwell, 2013). I identify early codes and concepts to be mindful of as I continued to collect data. As data process evolved, I made adaptations to my interview protocol and

approach to the interviews. Changes to interview protocol were informed by emerging themes and information gathered through the students and staff experiences.

### **Segmenting and Coding**

To maintain my grounded theory approach, I began data analysis while still collecting data. Using ATLAS.ti, I began with a simple open coding process, tagging any unit of data that might be relevant to the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During data analysis, I wrote memos to help organize my thoughts about data collection. This process was crucial in understanding the relationship among categories. I also began to see areas where repetition occurred driving ideas to saturation.

At conclusion of open coding, axial coding began with a deeper level of coding that looks at various property of a code. This process gives way to casual conditions, strategies, contextual and intervening conditions and consequences (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016). I used a combination of validation theory and shared governance model framework to identify codes that merited deeper analysis. I created networks and examined the interrelationships of my core categories in the network.

### **Participants**

During this study, I interviewed thirteen students from Impacted Learners Program (ILP) (pseudonym) and seven staff members which included faculty, counselors and administrators associated with ILP from Douglass Community College (DCC) (pseudonym). I was interested in examining the experiences of students during student equity program development process. Accordingly, using stratified sampling strategy for student participants. I selected seven (7) African American females and six (6) African American male students. The study participants were diverse in age ranging from 18 to

65 with diverse socio-economic background. The sample included both traditional and non-traditional age students. Majority of student participant were classified as nontraditional students, 9 out of 13 of the participants were over the age of 25. About 40 percent of student participants classified themselves as first generation in college. One non-traditional student resigned from twenty-year career to pursue education full time after she was inspired by her sister degree completion. 5 of the student participants moved to California in pursuit of higher education.

Majority of the students came from low socio-economic background. Most joined Impacted Learners Program to help cope with anticipated financial short-fall during the semester. The student who left her long tenured career described the financial hardship of her decision to return to school on her family. Her family now struggle from two income household to one where her spouse only works ten months out of the year as a K-12 teacher. Several students work full-time shifts while using benefits from ILP to supplement school need. Many of the student participants commute at least 30-45 minutes to school a few days per week. Several of the students visit DCC's food pantry several times a week from food insecurity. I provided a brief description of participants throughout the results section.

## **Results**

Throughout the data collection and analysis process several themes emerged. My data collection process was guided by validation theory and shared governance model; hence, the patterns in data and emerging themes were related to those conceptual framework. The focus of the study was to examine what factors shape African American community college students from participating in co-construction of student equity

programs. The central themes identified in the data are: (1) sense of belonging plays a critical role in student participation; (2) institutional barriers present challenges for student to participate in development of student equity programs; and (3) awareness and training in shared governance facilitates student self-confidence and interest in participating in decision-making processes.

### **Importance of Sense of Belonging on Campus**

During the data collection process, participants expressed the lack of sense of belonging at the predominantly white institution (PWI) eroded their experience as students. With low number of African American student body represented at DCC, students found themselves feeling alienated inside the classroom and out. African American students were aware of the low number of students represented by the African American student body as described by a student named Donny, a non-traditional former student athlete who transferred from a Division 1 institution after loss of scholarship, “I thought I was the only black kid on campus because I hadn’t seen anybody and I had the late start Spring classes so my classes definitely did not reflect that there were any black students on campus at all!” A sentiment echoed by another student, Esther, a traditional, first generation student majoring in dance, “It’ll be two or three of us in a class of 20 or 30. So I’m like, huh, this is odd,” Students did find that having low African American headcount could be of concern because they came to the institution with the expectation that there would be someone they could connect with that would understand their previous and maybe current circumstance. A point confessed by Esther, “It was odd because it was like I had no one to really relate to when I was in class”. A factor that is critical for student willingness to become part of the campus community.

In general, students who made efforts to create connections with faculty and peers sometimes found the recipient uninterested. Jennifer, non-traditional student returning to school after major personal and financial loss. A self-described optimist with high energy, characterized her experience as she attempts to connect, “I’m a person of the power of hello. And just because I don’t know you and I pass you by, I will say hello. There’s not much here of that.” She was dismayed that finding no validation from members of the campus community seem to be commonplace for African American students. Student often find they have to initiate first contact with staff and peers alike, which may be rebuffed. Student feeling of rejection from connection exacerbates feeling of alienation and division as explained by a student name Jerry, an out of state, non-traditional on a transfer path, “It’s not like you’re not supposed to be here. I do feel that deep, it’s us versus them type of environment.” Likewise, Toni, a non-traditional full-time student with goal of becoming a school counselor, described her experience at she attempts to rationalize with her feeling, “I’m just trying to get through school, so I kinda just try to pay it no mind. But some days, it is very, very frustrating, because of the subjects or the topics that happen in class. Yeah, it’s almost kinda like I’m not sitting in there, the way that they talk about black people sometimes.” The feeling of alienation can be so troubling that students often find retreat by simply quitting, as explained by Farrah, a non-traditional student with learning disability and hopes of transferring, “while taking the class I felt like I didn’t belong, so I dropped because I could feel I didn’t.”

**Peer interaction.** African American students seek a sense of belonging from their campus community by their engagement in the classroom and out. However, finding time to stay connected on campus is challenged by external obligations that often remove

students from campus life as expressed by Will, a traditional student, leaving at home and working part-time, “I don't really spend a lot of time with my school friends outside of school, because we're all busy. We all have jobs, we all have stuff that we do off of campus. To improve sense of belonging among program participants, ILP provides events like monthly meetings for students to attend and engage with peers while on campus with the hope that camaraderie will form among program participants. Although, some students have found this to be supportive in their journey like Esther who pointed that, “I like it because, its like I can relate more to people that look like me, and are trying to be ... What's the word? Trying to be progressive and want to go far in life, and that's what I want to do, so it's people that look like me, and who have the same drive as me.” Others, like, Jerry see these events as unproductive because it lacks consistency; in his words, “I don't communicate with people in ILP at all. I don't even know the people in ILP. We don't meet up. There's no group e-mail of who's who.”

Some students found that annual one-week college tours to Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) or across the state provide a unique bonding experience for program participants. Jimmy, a traditional student who works part-time, receive parental support, and one of the students on the HBCU tour, shared his experience, “now that we cooler on the HBCU tour, with everybody else, so like once you get on the plane with people, and you know, stay in hotels with people, you really get the connection with them.” A popular feeling among younger or traditional age students who attended the tour and are program participants. However, older or nontraditional students view this event as ceremonious, redundant, time wasting, or uninteresting. They were not interested in building camaraderie and view event as out of line with their

educational goal. One nontraditional age student viewed the tours this way, “they (ILP) do a lot of great things going to HBCs, I did that when I was 18 with my church. So I've done a lot of things that they're doing. Donny, expressed the lack of connection between HBCU tour and transfer goals, “I get more emails about this damn..umm...HBCU college tour than I do everything else...which I am like..don't get me wrong, HBCU all day, you know represent, hold it down, all that..but if you can't tell me what each college and university is known for...like what is the acceptance rate of these colleges, what are they best known for as far as programs, what do these different things look like, then I don't care about going to see em...what is that? A field trip just so I can get pictures in front of the statues, like I could care less about that.”

***Traditional vs. nontraditional.*** Peer interaction among ILP program participants did not materialized as program developers had expected because of the diverse perspectives of the student group. In this study, the sample of ILP participants revealed a glaring contrast of needs and attitudes between traditional and nontraditional students. Staff and participants, aware of the age difference among peers, tend to form views when addressing differences about how students respond to program. Nick, offered this perspective about her program peers, “I don't think they have grown up. They don't have a voice yet. So I don't think they care.” Jennifer was introspective as she initiates effort to be on common ground with fellow program participants, she candidly revealed that, “they know of me as an older person so they're kind of shy. But I try to welcome them, say hello to them, what's been happening? I try to get into that slang talk so they can feel comfortable with me.” She admits her intention is to create a culture of acceptance that was not always found on campus, so its critical to reach out first.

Nontraditional students also find that ILP is limited in its current design to their needs. A prevailing perspective among this group is that the program is set up to support traditional age students. Xavier, a second-year non-traditional student, with transfer goals, reflects on program direction, “I don't feel that it's always directed towards all of us, it's just more directed towards the people that are just getting started, or you know.” Nick, expressed her frustration with current program design, “The IL program, it's like a roller coaster with me, only because I'm not a kid and I'm not a (young) student. So I think my needs are a little bit more different.” While some students are calling for change to program development with phrases like, “I don't know if there should be a split for like older people or younger people, but for me it just doesn't ...” Others are ready for small scale program change that addresses, “couple of things that I would want to see different just because, again I'm older, so I am like ahh...no..we need to go ahead and push some different agenda on our ILP and get this thing popping.”

Program staff also acknowledged discrepant views between program participants. Rita, an ILP staff member noted:

I do agree, that traditional ones (students) attitude is I'm glad you guys are here. One thing I've notice with the nontraditional is, I know my skills, I know this, this is what I need, they're more like goal oriented. They want something more tangible. If I come to your office, what can I get out of visit versus the traditional one who's like I just wanna talk to you.

Peer interaction among ILP participants required change in the program format that address the needs of all participants. The aim of peer interaction in the program is to support student interaction that suffer in the classroom and out. Camaraderie among

participants open up opportunities for networking that students can rely on as they march towards academic success.

**Student-faculty interaction.** Student interaction with faculty seemed to be critical for ILP participants at DCC. As African Americans in a PWI, they sought engagement to improve their sense of belonging inside the classroom. However, student experiences with faculty is a mixture of support and discouragement. ILP participants stressed the insensitivity of faculty. With exasperation, Toni shared that her professor continuously stresses her because of her race, she recalls, “And because I’m the only black person in the class, she gives me assignments that nobody else has. I was like, “I’m not gonna do that, that’s not fair.” In some cases, students report that faculty was verbally insulting with questions like, “What’s wrong with you?” or attempt to publicly humiliate the student in the classroom. Farrah shared an example about one of her professors, “So when I would ask questions, she made me feel like belittled, like stupid, dumb, in the way she was answering and I felt like she was trying to embarrass me in front of the class.” Classroom situation sometime escalated for students, two days prior to our interview, Donny revealed, “I literally just had an incident just happen on Tuesday, where a professor was yelling at me.”

Students who reported having difficult interaction with a professor, expressed that other faculty members were supportive. Donny, the student that was yelled at by one of her professors, recalled the impact of her English professor, “when I first got here, like he was super supportive and he’s probably the main reason why I stayed in this because of our interaction allow me to understand that there is more of his type of teacher than there are the other.” Farrah, once humiliated by a teacher, recounted support from her

professor, “I even had a Math teacher that stayed with me to help me with my problems, so I had a great experience.” Erick, a traditional, out-of-state, full-time student-athlete, working part-time on campus, recalled the support and advise his instructor offered as he confronted the challenge of balancing his schedule:

She was telling me, "Oh I understand." That she does the same thing. She drives from Long Beach, she has to wake up at four in the morning. So she was able to relate to me. Well, it wasn't like forced or anything. We were able to relate. She was just telling me that if I have to drink coffee, stuff like that, to wake up, to do that. Because I'm not really much of a caffeine person. So she was telling me to better manage my time and stuff. Get as much rest as possible with the time that I have.

Sophie, a non-traditional, single mom in pursuit of her Associate degree, believed she was validated by her instructors as she struggled with doubts about her sense of belonging on campus. Her interaction with faculty confirmed her belief as she shared, “but as far as feeling like I belong, I think I've sat down with a lot of great faculty members here that have reassured me that I do belong.”

### **Institutional Barriers to Participation in the Development of Student Equity Programs**

**Political nature.** The political system at DCC developed as a system of governance that promoted program efficiency as an institution. Consequently, the majority of stakeholders within that political system on campus seemed to shape student participation within student equity program development. I spoke with staff at DCC to understand the political nature and identify key decision-makers in the program

development process. I spoke with Darla (pseudonym), a full-time tenured faculty who served as the first coordinator for equity program development to provide historical context on how equitable power sharing with various campus stakeholders under student equity. Darla recalled in her mission to erect Student Equity at DCC, “it’s interesting to know that one of the hardest things was getting them to work together, that there was some kind of I almost want to say competition.” The “them” that Darla is referring to is the academic faculty unit and student services counseling unit or counselors. She provided a background for a prevailing institutional assumption:

Who's right and who's wrong. I'll give you just an off-the-cuff answer on that and that is what I was hearing a lot was the counselors blaming the faculty for what was going on with the students and then the faculty blaming the counselors, okay, and we know that the literature shows that way back in even high school, junior high or whatever, that counselors can often make assumptions about their students, right. Unfortunately, we see this here on our campus.

Casting blame seemed to erode the relationship between the two faculty units as she explains, “And so part of having that community of practice was a real conscious attempt on my part to get us to work together because I kept seeing this, like, people ragging on each other, you know.” Darla revealed a consequential meeting where the decision was made for control of decision making process for student equity at DCC. Darla recalled, “We talked about it, but then I think ultimately whatever is being discussed on the administrative level and with this faculty senate that somehow, you know, but then again with the faculty senate at least we do have the committee itself being run by a faculty member.” Ultimately, the outcome of negotiations between administrators and the faculty

senate led to giving control of decision-making power of the Student Equity committee to the academic senate.

The academic senate, composed of only faculty members, would be in charge of a Student Equity Committee. They would hold the power to appoint all voting members in the committee that would approve funding for all project proposals submitted under student equity. Additionally, they would also appoint non-voting members as resources. An amendment was written into the academic senate by-laws specifying composition of student equity committee. Of the eight original voting committee members, five were faculty. Students, staff and administration were represented by 1 vote each. (DCC Student Equity Plan, 2015-16).

**Faculty attitudes.** Student participation tended to be constrained by shared attitudes among administrators and faculty that prevented participants from garnering support that will empower their institutional decision-making process. An administrator/faculty answer to students' absence from participation was view as, "usually students check out. Unless you're talking about something that directly impacts them, they're usually not involved with, impressed with the bigger, how are things run. Especially at that level. Especially at the level for Douglass College, where it's basically a Senate-run committee." Another faculty placated student interest for involvement as, "I will say that my gut says that developmentally I think they have enough on their plate with just dealing with what they're academically challenged to do."

When students in ILP requested to have curriculum designed for contextualized course in African American heritage, one administrator in support of the initiative explained why the proposal was denied, "that perception that we don't have ... You're

talking about a handful of students. Why do we need to create a whole course? Why do we need to do this whole thing for just a few students? So that was some of that holding that, or pushback that we received.” An ILP coordinator offered her assessment of why request for curriculum change by students fell short:

And then we try to direct them to the right avenue. It's just that students, especially students who are at lower level English and Math scores; they're a little bit more intimidated. I don't see them stepping forward and saying, “Hey, it's my right to be able to have someone teach me that I can see knows what I've been through.”

### **Shared Governance: Awareness and Training Facilitate Student Self-Confidence and Interest in Participating in Decision-Making Processes**

**Student Equity Committee.** In general, the driving force for student equity programs like Impacted Learners Program is the student equity committee. The committee structure was formed and approved by DCC academic senate comprised of faculty members. Out of the nine voting members on the committee, six are faculty currently sitting on the academic senate or appointed by the academic senate. One student representative was assigned by student government, one staff assigned by CSEA, the classified employees union and one manager assigned by administration. Mona, a faculty member and one of the architect of the student equity plan said this about the committee composition, “There's lots of faculty involved in the committee itself, so it's good representation.” However, the structural make up of the committee is troubling to ILP staff because the selection process excluded counselors and coordinators who directly work with students. Jazz, an ILP staff member, affirms her incredulity with this statement, “Because we do not have a say, we don't have a vote. Like today for example

... Prime example, today they're doing all of the voting on all of the proposals that were submitted, there's not one person of color on that committee that has a voting say.” Other ILP staff members shared their depth of exclusion this way, “They never asked me to be on the committee.” As an integral staff member in the ILP program, Diane responds: “I know there is a committee, I just haven't been part of it.”

In the committee, challenges tended to abound with the functional process. One of the committee challenges was transparency according to ILP staffers. Student equity committee was not part of the institutions standing governance committee nor did it report to any, therefore, minutes and agendas were not easily accessible for inspection. Jazz, who sits on the committee as a non-voting member viewed the committee’s governance process this way, “it's more of an in house, they send it out to the faculty members, they don't send it to governance. Not at all. They don't send the information, that doesn't mean that they're not allowed to, they just don't ... If you don't know, then how are you going to participate?”

Another challenge focused on how funding was awarded to proposal. One of the criteria for student equity project proposal is for project to directly serve Disproportionally Impacted (DI) students, which includes ILP participants. However, project proposals with good intentions, but with failure to capture significant numbers of DI students are passed through committee. Jazz offered insight to this challenge as she explains, “But here you're saying that I'm going to propose this and I'm gonna have embedded tutors in this English class, what's gonna guarantee you that in that English class you're gonna have a large population of DI students?”

Committee members also seemed to be challenged by how to assess non instructional support for DI students. Without DI student participation, members show difficulty in determining allocation of resources for ILP students. Jazz shared how members could not see the value of DI student visiting HBCU as investment in students. She recounts, “One of the issues that the committee has is that it's so expensive; it's close to \$1700 to take each student. And so to take them across to go check the historically universities and colleges, it's costly, but what they don't realize is that you're inspiring these 15 students who can turn around and inspire another 15 students who can inspire.”

**Program development challenges.**

*Planning.* Without inclusion and proper support, program development faced several challenges to meet target goals and deliver on student success. When Impacted Learners Program developed as part of the student equity learning communities, planning was orchestrated by faculty and administrators. The Student Equity Plan (SEP) states that a student representative was structurally involved in the planning process. However, daily planning had no sign of student participants actively engaged in the process. One of the coordinators of student equity communities provided historical context on the level of student participation at the outset of program development, “initial stage it was David Carter (pseudonym), so he was there throughout all of the... There was no student input at that time because we were still trying to formulate what was the intent, what was our target, what we were trying to do, how we were going to close the gap.” As planning progressed to form learning communities, there were no signs of active student participation in the planning process. It was faculty input that was invited to co-construct program as expressed by the coordinator, “Once we decided that we wanted to do

learning communities ... Because it's not only a counseling component, but when you start looking at learning communities, then you want to include the English department, the Math department, the Social Science department.”

Once program was fully operational with personnel hired to support student success, student participation in planning continued to be negated for improvement. When asked about student participation in ILP, one program manager verified that, “so they (students) obviously participate, but they're not involved in the planning.” A staff member in ILP learning community stated this about student participation in planning:

I think it would help a lot. I think it's important to have our students have a voice in that this would like to have. At least to say that out there because whoever is making the decisions is making the decisions in their perspective, it might be totally different. In order for us to serve our students better we need to have the students tell us this is what we need. This is what we need because I might be thinking this is what they need but in reality they need something else.

**Events.** Without active student participation in program planning, students are bound to lose interest in ILP offerings. This was evident in the events that students are encouraged to participate in. One student, Xavier, had this to say about his desire to attend ILP proposed events,

Even with the workshops and things, for me I don't really feel attracted to go to a lot of them, because it's like test taking strategies and stuff that is for people that are just starting college, rather than for people that are either halfway through or almost out.” Event are offered without preface for the student type and level of engagement to expect.

Another student expressed similar sentiments on ILP events:

I don't really participate. At first, it was interesting, because I was new to campus. I was trying to get involved in something. But even then, it wasn't really interesting, what they were offering here. I mean, there's a lot of resources, and there's a lot of ways you can get more Black students incorporated into this program, but we're not looking at these students. We're not doing things that the students would want, our interests.

As ILP staff search for ways to retain students, one advisor expressed her concern, "a lot of students are transferring or I'm losing students the second year, because one, they're probably no longer engage in the program. They're not interested, or they have other obligations." Students find that they don't relate to events planned by ILP and if they spoke of change to administrators they maybe judged or face backlash by losing program support. One student vulnerable shared that, "I don't know what else to do, cause, I don't want to step on no toes. There was one thing that I wanted to do that with...and didn't do it cause again I don't want to step on toes and I don't want it to come back that I jumped over the hierarchy or whatever." Another student echoed similar sentiments, "'Oh, well if I say something to Diane (Pseudonym for program staff) then she's going to think differently of me."

In the past, ILP has provided a platform for students in the form of a student club. It was initially facilitated by an adjunct advisor and when the advisor left the institution, there has been inconsistency with faculty support. However, students find that this platform will increase their level of participation. In one student's words:

It's like, why is there no involvement? Why can't we start a club? Why have there not been talks of a club? Why haven't there been talks of this, and this, and this? We want to get more involved, but you're not getting your African American students any sort of platforms. You're not working with us.

The lack of student platform erodes program's ability to engage students as Donny explains, "you know..but that just how disconnected it is, where its like....there's this gap, you know and the only time you ever get to see everybody who is in ILP is for the mandatory meeting...and that it."

There is no doubt that student welcome a change to congregate with each other beyond required meeting as a path to program improvement. Jennifer in her optimism offers,

To make it better. I think that if the students come together more often than what is demanded in the rules, I think that we can put our heads together and start these cookouts or whatever way they want to go to get that and to move it forward.

***Student awareness/visibility.*** Students in ILP were generally concerned by the lack of visibility of the program. Although their input was not solicited for improvement, some believed that the program doesn't muster sufficient effort to promote to African American student on campus. One student shared her experience on visibility, "And do you know for a fact, I've spoken to some black African Americans here. They have no clue that Impacted Learner exist. So I don't know how they're getting the word out, because I didn't know they existed."

Esther , a second year student viewed ILP program visibility this way:

I think that the program could be more improved ... Letting the rest of the school know more about the program, because, I have a lot of friends that are, again, black students, but they're not a part of Impacted Learner, and they're just like, "What do they do? What are they for, How are they going to help me? Things like that." So I think their advertisement to the school, to get more students to join the program can be a little bit better.

Jimmy, an ILP participant pointed out opportunities for visibility that was not seized, " I think we don't have, we don't advertise enough. When we have club fares, or events, period."

ILP staff believed that they are making efforts to get the message out and connect with students. An ILP staff member believe that student are on social media and the program makes effort on this front as she expresses, "Remember, they also had an Instagram account, and they also had a Facebook account. So they tried to do announcements that way." A more typical approach of creating program awareness is what an ILP advisor describes:

We connect it to other faculty. Why? Because whoever comes to the counseling department and they see okay, you could be part of this program too. They will refer them to us. Or professors they would also be able to refer students to us. I know that being visual it is a challenge.

***Inadequate benefits.*** Students join ILP because of the benefits that program provides. Below is an ILP counselor describing why students join:

I know that those benefits are the ones that get people to our program, and it's not a lot, to be honest. Top card, unfortunately, will only give them once per semester

and the top card only last 30 days. I know that is something that if we were to increase that instead of giving just one, giving two or three like we do with the meal vouchers, I think we might get more people.

After joining ILP, students realize that program benefits come with limitations that hamper the expected continuous support. For nontraditional students, this is viewed as program challenge in need of change as expressed by Xavier, “Like, they help with a bus pass, but they don't do anything to help with parking passes for people that have cars. I've brought that to her attention and I think overall that could be something that could improve.”

A big draw for African American students when they become part of ILP is having access to personalized counseling. The program provides an African American counselor which student have stated is important for relatability. Toni, an ILP participants describes why she goes to a particular counselor:

Because I can relate to her more, being that we're both minorities, and she's young. So, it seems easier to talk to her, and to get an understanding. Definitely. Yeah, I think it definitely makes a big difference because usually I don't go to see counselors, so because she is, I can relate to her more. I have no problem going to see her or emailing her, to talk to her, to get understanding about something.

Other students shared similar thoughts. For example, Nick expressed the need for preference for an African American counselor “I think there's like another one, but I don't even know who the other person is. But I only want to go to Diane. I've seen her out randomly at a black women's brunch. She's just like...she's always encouraging me to like

do different things. Anytime I have a question I can have it settled within a 30 minute session.”

However, availability of counselors for ILP participants is limited, often a frustrating reality when forced to balance multiple equally important priorities. Jerry relates how limited access to ILP counselor becomes inconveniencing, he adds, “she's only here, I think, only two days a week, or three days a week, or something. She's not here on key days that I'm here. That's hard, because I have to change my schedule just to meet with a counselor.”

ILP staff also grapples with difficulty of limited access to the services they provide. One counselor relates her communication with students seeking immediate counseling services:

They do tell me that and I feel bad because they email me and are like, "Hey can I meet with you on Tuesday?" And I'd be like, "I'm sorry, I'm not available on Tuesday, but the other counselor is, you're more than able to meet with her." And they're like, "No. I want to meet with you." And I'm like, "Well, I'm sorry. I'm not available. Let's try to plan out another day." It is very hard now that my hours has decreased in equity.

**Funding.** It is not surprising that program deficiencies can be tied to the level of program funding. However, staff and coordinators of ILP were alarmed by the institutional barriers that plague the program to the detriment of participants. A favorite staff member for most of the participants describe the shortage of access to counselor like this, “I just felt, it's unfair for the students, but when the manager was decreasing hours due to funding, she wasn't really thinking about how hard it's going to effect the students.” As advocates for students’ need in the program, counselors and coordinators

attempt to persuade student equity committee to provide additional resources for participants which are often met with denial. Diane talked about her effort to help students get additional resources for lab fees:

Like, last semester I applied for additional funding to help students with lab fees. Like lab supplies cost so much money. And I got denied. Because I believe student equity, we have an emergency grant set aside for students, to help in case of emergencies. But again, that's not quite emergency. It's a need though, that the students have.

ILP staff are not voting members of student equity committee to convey importance of additional funding for programmatic change or sway outcome of student equity issues. A program coordinator confessed the voting process this way:

And that's one of the issues, is that you might say I'm a person of color that I have a say, I don't have a say. I have to submit my proposal like everyone else and if they say no, then I have no money for things. And a lot of it is that we don't really have a running budget, so it's sort of hard to plan events until you know if you're gonna have money to plan events, or if we do plan events, then we have to go find money from...

*Students' willingness to participate.* Most ILP students were not aware of the existence of student equity committee or the impact of the committee decision making process. Some confused the awareness student equity concept with student equity committee. Here is one student response to her level of awareness, "Equity is like, it's like a, I think it's more of like a equal rights kinda group for like all the minorities on campus. It's not just ILP, it's like a latino group, it's just all the..."

ILP participants also generally did not know how to get involved in student government for opportunity to serve on the student equity committee. However, ILP staff did attempt to educate participants on student government. One staff member described her attempt to influence participants, “I’m encouraging students to get involved as much as possible, because it looks great when they’re applying for applications to school, UC applications, CSU applications.”

Sophie, an ILP participant, confirmed staff effort to inform students, “I think that maybe at one of the introduction meetings with ILP, it was brought up in the sense that... Okay students, student government is accepting applications. Here's the date.”

Regardless of the learning curve necessary for inclusion, ILP participants and staff desired to participate in the committee process. Students like Jennifer, humbled in their willingness to participate, states, “Oh sure, just to see what is it like. I would love that.” Some students responded more realistically as Xavier did, “It just depends on if it fits into my schedule, and if I feel like I’m actually being heard when I’m there.” Others like Harry see it as an opportunity for change as he states, “if I could do something to actually help the different student equity programs, then, yes, definitely.”

### **Summary of Results**

Students and staff interviewed for this study included different genders, majors, educational level, and personal experiences. As each expressed their thoughts and feelings about sense of belonging in campus environment, dealing with institutional barriers that stem from attitudes that support certain political nature, exclusion from the process of student equity program development while forced to deal with challenges

endured on a programmatic level. They persevered with the hope that participation will become more equitable on an institutional level.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

I gathered the data presented in the previous chapter as part of this qualitative study using grounded theory as the research design framework. Through a series of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, I examined factors that affect student active participation in student equity program development at an urban community college. Participants represented diverse backgrounds which included traditional and nontraditional age students, and staff of Impacted Learners Program. With students and staff, I asked questions that were guided from the lens of validation and shared governance conceptual framework.

I invited students and staff to participate in the study via email. Upon confirmation of interview, I reviewed consent form prior to the start of the interview with every participant. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. In total, twenty interviews were conducted in a variety of settings chosen by the participant. Students represented backgrounds that roughly mirrored the institutional composition. During the interview introduction, I provided a brief explanation of purpose of the study. As presented in the previous chapter, focusing on student's thoughts and feelings resulted in the sharing of intimate details and open dialog about student participation from the perspective of community college students and staff. During the interviews, students shared their experiences, including their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of sense of belonging on campus, level of shared governance participation on institutional level, and discussion of programmatic challenges with Impacted Learners Program.

In this chapter, I summarize thematic results from data analysis. Then, I interpret thematic results of data analysis through the conceptual lenses of validation and shared

governance model used in this study as I evaluate my primary research question: What factors shape African American students' participation in student equity program development in a public urban California community college? I follow with a discussion of limitations, and I end with a set of actionable recommendations for practice.

### **Summary of Results**

At the end of data analysis process, several themes were identified, including importance of sense of belonging, institutional barriers dictated by internal campus politics, level of student immersion in shared governance and challenges at program level. Student identified alienation consistently as a source of lack of sense of belonging on campus. Peer interaction among participants varied based on age, life experience of students, and attitude toward others in ILP. Student-faculty interaction also varied among students. Students found both support and frustration with faculty as they struggle for validation.

DCC staff shared perspective on institutional barriers that prevents student participants from full inclusion into the participation process. Cited among staff, included internal rivalry among staff that obstruct students from opportunity to participate. Also, faculty attitude did contribute to the level of participation that students are allowed to engage in. Therefore, the structural nature of shared governance is largely affected by the level of student representatives on student equity committee. Both staff and students recounted the current state of inefficacious program design that attributed to exclusion of student participation in the development process. Many participants recounted inadequate program support.

### **Discussion of Findings**

I began this study with a focus on exploring factors that shape African American students' participation in student equity program development in public urban California community colleges. From work in this investigation, the following factors shape how African American community college students participate in student equity program development: (1) validation must be evident for sense of belonging for African American students; (2) institutional barriers that limit African American student participation exists; and (3) purposeful student involvement in shared governance for African American students necessitate participation.

### **Validating African American Students' Sense of Belonging**

The current body of research indicate that sense of belonging for African American students at Predominantly White Institution (PWI) is a crucial factor to persistence and retention (Baber, 2012; Cuyjet, 1998; Hurtado, 1992; Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Pounds, 1987). A fact that continues to remain true especially among African American community college students. However, there is a dearth of research that focuses on program where students are both co-structor and beneficiaries of programs at the community college level. As enrollment and completion rate for African American students continue to fall, inclusion and support by student equity programs serve as tool for retention. However, when students slated for such programs are made to feel invalidated and their inclusion does not matter to an institution, program failure is inevitable. The study attempts to build on growing body of evidence in favor of validating the inclusion of African American students' participation in institutional policy change and decision making.

The role of sense of belonging in various educational contexts has been well documented. Laura Rendon, 1994 study on validation theory which focuses on what students need within campus environments, established model that can invigorate completion and success. Student of color need validation from both in class and out of class agents especially at PWIs. In my study, African American students discussed importance of sense of belonging in reference to their feeling of alienation. They acknowledged the role that race plays in how they are perceived and its effects on classroom contribution. Students discussed in much detail about their enthusiasm for learning and participation when validation occurs in the classroom. In fact, Booker (2007) describes how the level of sense of belongingness increases motivation and achievement. However, in the absence of validation that occur from lack of initial contact with students by faculty or no encouraging words that support students' self-confidence, disengagement begins to occur.

### **Institutional Barriers that Limit African American Student Participation**

Institutional barriers create challenges for African American students to participate in development of student equity program. As community colleges engage in economizing behaviors as a result of global forces, these economizing behaviors shape governance structures (Kater, 2017). At DCC, the political system tends to manifest in faculty efforts to maintain power against perceived, corporatization of their profession by administrators and state and federal policies (Gerber, 2014; Levin, Kater, Wagoner, 2011). In this study, an implication here relates to faculty inadvertently negating equal participation of students in an attempt to guard existing power in student equity. Faculty from this study shared the following rationale for student exclusion from participation:

(1) student's inability to comprehend requirements for active participation; (2) students' primary purpose is to focus on academic work; and (3) students generally do not care about the governance of the institution. However, African American students view access from participatory process as withholding agency that should help shape rather than be shaped by (Cook-Sather, 2003) their educational experiences.

Although DCC provided diversity training to faculty to support their work with students of color and hired a diversity coordinator to improve campus awareness on related issues, African American students in this study reported low engagement and participation. Harper (2009) noted that low engagement is a result of institutional neglect, a failure of colleges and universities to create collegiate environments that facilitate positive student engagement. To change faculty attitudes towards encouraging African American student participation, a shift in validating students may support a steady level of engagement among students. Linares, Muñoz, & Rendon, (2011) argue for making students stronger by assisting them to believe in their ability to learn, acquire self-worth, and increase their motivation to succeed. African American students at DCC expressed high level of praise for faculty and were enthusiastic about being on campus when validation was present. When faculty acknowledged their existence in the classroom or either staff or administrator validated their presence on campus, the desire for connectedness and network with the campus community appeared to increase.

### **Purposeful Student Involvement in Shared Governance of African American Students**

Socialization of students into shared governance through awareness and training elevates self confidence and desire to participate in decision-making process. In this

study, students tended to be unaware of student equity decision-making process that affects programmatic direction that were facilitated through a governance committee. They generally did not know who voted, what was voted for, the impact of the decision made through the committee, or how to become part of the process. Further, there tended to be little to no information provided for students nor was training offered. It was with little surprise that, increasingly students marginalized from key institutional and academic decisions and lacking incentives for governance work would create a culture of apathy (Gerber, 2014). Inclusion of the right type of student body alone at DCC into the structural facet of shared governance will not effect change in student participation. To this point, Birnbaum (2004) argues that, it is the process of shared governance, and not its outcome, that helps to build the dense network of connections that create social capital (p.15). Change to the composition of the committee and regulations may encourage student representatives to participate more effectively. However, structural governance participation for students will find its footing only when well- integrated process of functional governance participation among all stakeholders of the committee is present.

**Structural involvement.** At the outset of developing a committee to guide activities of student equity, the structure of shared governance at DCC included one student representative elected by the student government board. Unfortunately, the representative selected was not required to come from the population served under student equity. More alarming is the reliance of a diverse student body on one student representative vote in the committee. In general, students at DCC in this study viewed their instructors as expert authorities both inside and outside of the classroom, a feeling that faculty have more expert power than students do, because of their knowledge, skills,

education, and certification of their official position (Johnson, 2012). Conversely, in shared governance committee settings, where all members are collegial and equal in power with vote-casting ability, students tend to maintain the same view of faculty committee members as having more authority. For African American students in this study, they continue to view faculty as authority rather than collegial, therefore, find the process intimidating without training and sought to avoid participation in shared governance committee.

The ideas that flow from shared governance structures make available to students and the community one of the most precious traditions of a free society: the practice of fearless inquiry—without which students cannot experience the freedom to think, question, and make their own choices (Collins, 2002). As students adjust to the shared governance process forming relationship with colleagues on the committee, student begin to realize that perceptions of self-worth and perceptions of fairness are related; when one feels valued, one is also more likely to believe that the group is functioning effectively and fairly (Birnbaum, Tierney & Lechuga, 2004).

**Functional involvement.** This is the facet of shared governance that encompasses the systems of social connections and interactions in an organization that help to develop and maintain individual and group norms (Birnbaum, 2004, Bowen & Tobin, 2015). For African American students in the study, gaining access to shared governance would overcome structural challenge to participation. However, functional participation would require student understanding of navigating their way through the complex process of becoming influential within the committee. In the study, participants stated their vested interest for improvement to the Impacted Learner Program. Overall, they tended to

understand that organizational cultures are created over time through the interaction of people and the cognitive processes through which people come collectively to share perceptions and “make sense” of what they are doing (Birnbaum, 2004). They echoed that institutional support is required to harness the skills necessary to be an effective representative while forming relationship with other stakeholders.

### **Study Limitations**

As the researcher, I made effort to include a variety of African American student experiences in Impacted Learners Program (ILP). However, no study is without limitation. My stratified random sampling strategy for students included two groups, seven (7) women and six (6) men. With a greater sample size, results might yield additional information that was not addressed in this study. I also interviewed 6 female staff members and only one male staff. The reason was I interviewed only staff that were currently employed in ILP program at the time of interview based on their interaction with students and participation in program development. Interview with additional number of staff working directly or indirectly with ILP could have yielded additional information about factors. Additionally, I interviewed ILP staff for the purpose of triangulation of student interview and written program documents and artifacts to corroborate statement made by students. Another limitation to the study was only half of all student participants responded back after member checking transcript. Another limitation to the study is due to time factor, I did not attempt to collect more data from the academic senate to confirm or clarify themes related to challenges from institutional barriers.

### **Recommendations for Practice and Future Research**

Regardless of this study limitations, findings from this study have implications for improving program development practice within student equity at California community colleges. This study contributes to the body of literature and builds on valuable insights about the importance of validation for African American community college students to develop a sense of belonging from institutions with barriers that prevent participation in shared governance process.

### **Address Institutional Barriers to Participation and Sense of Belonging with Professional Development**

Institutions struggle with support of marginalized students of color with a sense of belonging. For African American students, classroom validation by faculty improve student levels of self-confidence and validation (Linares et al. 2011; Pounds 1987). Beyond providing pedagogical support for faculty, institutions must offer professional development that rest on the foundation of validation. Faculty can gain in their work with students of color with training on racial and cultural sensitivity to which students perceive that they are wanted and needed part of the community in daily interaction.

To improve institutional barriers that have long been a deficit for African American student at DCC, faculty practice rooted in validation will provide students with confidence that they are creators of knowledge and are valuable members of the college learning community (Linares et. al, 2011). With rise in student confidence, faculty work to facilitate student empowerment so that student can become active participants both inside and outside the classroom.

### **Reframe Structures of Student Equity Committees**

As institutions continue to use shared governance as a model to develop policy and practice for student equity, it is critical to increase student involvement. Birnbaum (2004) suggests enhancing leadership, developing training, and building relationships might be more effective methods for improving institutional operations. Institutions must move away from the assumption that students are apathetic. By reframing the structure of governance for more student inclusion, institutions reinforce a desire to be more equitable to marginalized student groups. Students will have a broader view of a system at play for effective functioning of the academy and collegiality among constituents to improve practice. A broad scale collaboration between California Community College Chancellor's Office and California Academic Senate to offer training on shared governance for students can provide a system change across the state into student equity program development by providing a best practices for institutions.

### **Successful Student Involvement Approaches**

**Summer Bridge for student involvement.** For African American students, especially students served in student equity programs with desire to participate in governance, development of a summer bridge workshop can serve a pathway into student government that will prepare students for shared governance. African American students in this study were not aware of the historical context of committee work that led to development of student equity programs. Further, there were cultural and philosophical differences that exist among committee members that provide diverse lens to issues confronted at DCC. Students will need training to understand mission of the committee they serve. They will learn how to read meeting minutes to understand how past decisions were derived. As part of improving the functional process of governance, participants

would be prepared on how to address for sensitivity to other stakeholders perspectives in order to contribute holistically. However, once informed they become motivated because they understand that their work will benefit other students.

If a current student government training program exist at an institution, recruiting African American students into existing student governance training would allow student to further integrate into the fabric of the institution by gaining from a pre-established training. African American student will have to opportunity to learn from peers and staff on campus on how to advocate for program improvement while developing the necessary skills to participate in shared governance.

**Student involvement handbook.** In this study, students overwhelmingly acknowledged that they were not aware of existence of student equity committee or what the committee does. In fact, students confided that their desire to participate in the process would increase if more information were available to understand the commitment level. Institutions can offer encouragement for participation by offering student involvement handbook. With this tool, students will understand structure, purpose, function and policies that guide shared governance process. From the handbook, students may understand time dedication, how to contact support for issues that arise from committee meetings, and balance of involvement with their academics.

### **Comparative Study among Institutional Types**

Student equity program development is a phenomenon at all levels of higher education. Each institutional type has the latitude of developing student equity programs that attempt to address challenges unique to its disproportionately impacted student population(s). This qualitative study's aim to understand factors that shape African-

American student participation could be extended with a comparative study by investigating the same phenomenon at other types of higher education institution outside of community colleges. As student demographics change with influx of more non-traditional age students, the importance of student equity program development approaches in various campus contexts of higher education, especially among African American student populations, can provide rich data that shed light on barriers faced. Further, survey instruments that capture various student profiles can reveal to what extent institutions have become less than traditional at various institutional types to consider if barriers from student equity development are similar or perhaps there are distinct challenges students face at different institutional types.

### **Conclusion**

Student equity programs in California Community Colleges were developed to support disproportionately impacted students to reach completion goals after years of falling behind their peers. For many urban colleges, the program is a source relief for student persistence and retention. However, development of student equity programs were fashioned through institutional barriers where educators working in “pedagogical solitude” are constrained by internal political strife to concoct programs with little to no student participation. Tepid attempts without student inclusion in program development leave participants uninterested further delaying closure of achievement gaps.

This study offers evidence that removal of institutional barrier can stimulate student participation for African American community college students when validation from institutional agents who empower students’ self-confidence are present. Further, the study suggests that when students experience validation from institutional agents they

develop a sense of belonging that support their feeling of acceptance as part of the campus community. With adequate training through summer bridge program and student involvement handbook, institutions will do a far better job of welcoming African American students into the fabric of institutional life, which, in turn, supports African American students' participation in the shared governance process and African American students' desire to persist and complete their programs of study.

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## **Appendix A. Research Invitation**

### **CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE**

#### **AN EXAMINATION OF FACTORS THAT SHAPE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT PARTICIPATION WITHIN STUDENT EQUITY PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

Re: Participating in a study on student participation

Dear GCC Student,

I am writing you to request your participation in my dissertation study currently being conducted at California State University, Northridge (CSUN). The focus of my research is to determine what factor affect student participation within program development under student equity in community colleges. I am currently conducting this study as part of the Ed.D degree requirements.

The purpose of the research is to understand what factors affect student participation in program development and how student involvement can be improved. Findings from this study will be used to inform program developers at community colleges. Your participation in this study includes one 45-60 minute one-on-one, personal, semi-structured interview. After the interview, I will send you the transcripts and ask for you to “member-check” the content to ensure I captured our conversation accurately. Any personal identifiable characteristics, such as your name or college affiliation, will not

appear in the study in any way. Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Your time and participation in this study is greatly appreciated. If you would like to participate, please contact me via email: [austin.kemie.4@my.csun.edu](mailto:austin.kemie.4@my.csun.edu), or by phone: (818) 679-2698.

Thank you in advance for considering participation in this study.

Successfully,

Austin Kemie

**Appendix B. Informed Consent form**

**California State University, Northridge**

**CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

**AN EXAMINATION OF FACTORS THAT SHAPE AFRICAN AMERICAN  
STUDENT PARTICIPATION WITHIN STUDENT EQUITY PROGRAM  
DEVELOPMENT IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Factors that affect student participation in program development at community college is a study conducted by Austin Kemie as part of the requirements for the Ed.D. degree in the Michael Eisner's College of Education. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

**RESEARCH TEAM**

**Researcher:**

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**PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this research study is to understand factors that affect student participation in program development under student equity at community colleges.

**SUBJECTS**

**Inclusion Requirements**

You are eligible to participate in this study if you:

- are currently enrolled at a community college and have spent a semester in a student equity program.
- have attended community college and was part of a student equity program during your time at the institution.

**Time Commitment**

This study will involve approximately 1-2 hours of your time over the course of 6-9 months.

**PROCEDURES**

The following procedures will occur: After receiving and accepting my interview invitation we will schedule a one-on-one, semi-structured interview in a location of your choosing. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Following the interview, you will be asked to review the transcripts of the interview to ensure I captured the conversation accurately.

### **RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include: Mild emotional discomfort when discussing personal issues around student equity. All of your information will be kept confidential, pseudonyms will be used, and all of the data will be stored in a secure location. This study involves minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life. If you experience emotional discomfort from responding to questions from this study, please contact counseling services at Glendale Community College campus mental health services at (818) 240-1000 to help address any concerns raised by the study.

### **BENEFITS**

#### **Subject Benefits**

The possible benefits you may experience from the procedures described in this study include an increased understanding of one's own sense of fairness and experiences.

Limited direct benefit to the subject is anticipated.

#### **Benefits to Others or Society**

This study may assist college administrators and program developers in developing effective student oriented programs with contribution from students and facilitating student success at community colleges.

### **ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION**

Written essays answering the interview or follow up questions will be accepted if you are for some reason unable to participate in the interviews.

### **COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT**

#### **Costs and Reimbursements**

There is no cost to you for participation in this study. You will not be reimbursed for any out of pocket expenses, such as parking or transportation fees.

### **WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND**

#### **CONSEQUENCES**

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the research team immediately. The researcher may also end your participation in this study if you do not follow instructions, miss scheduled visits, or if your safety and welfare are at risk.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

#### **Subject Identifiable Data**

All identifiable information that will be collected about you will be removed at the end of data collection. All identifiable information that will be collected about you will be removed and replaced with a code. A list linking the code and your identifiable information will be kept separate from the research data in a locked file cabinet in my workplace office. Names will not be reported in the findings.

**Data Storage**

All research data will be stored on a computer that is password protected. The audio recordings will be transcribed and deleted at the end of data collection. All of the identifiable data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office and all of the de-identifiable data will be stored on a password-protected laptop. The audio recordings will also be stored initially in a password protected laptop, but then transcribed and erased as soon as possible.

**Data Access**

The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to all identifiable and de-identifiable data. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

**Data Retention**

The researcher intends to keep the research data in a locked file cabinet in my workplace office for five years. With your written permission, other researchers will have access to the data for future research.

**Mandated Reporting**

Under California law, the researcher is required to report known or reasonably suspected

incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any researcher has or is given such information, he or she may be required to report it to the authorities.

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form. If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

I agree to participate in the study.

I agree to be audio recorded

I do not wish to be audio recorded

---

Participant Signature

Date

---

Printed Name of Participant

---

Researcher Signature

Date

---

Printed Name of Researcher

Date

**Appendix C. General Interview Guide for Student Participants**  
**Factors That Shape African American Student Participation Study**  
**General Interview Guide**

**I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background**

**Welcome and introduction:**

*Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the interview session, I'd like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research.*

**Purpose of the interview:**

*The purpose of this interview is intended to collect information for a research study that examines factors affect student participation in the Impacted Learner Program. During the interview we will talk about your personal experience as a student in the Impacted Learner Program. I will be recording our interview with a recorder and all your responses will be kept confidential during the entire study. You can stop this interview at anytime if you feel uncomfortable for any reason. Please feel free to ask me any questions about this study.*

**Timing:**

*The interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?*

## **II. Interview Session**

### **Main Questions**

#### **Interview Protocol**

1. What was your experience like, in terms of when you first came to Douglass (Pseudonym)? What is your general sense of your experience at DCC and being an African American student and what that felt like for you?
2. How did you become involved with ILP and can you describe your college experience since joining ILP?
3. How would you describe your level of participation in the program or activities offered by ILP?
4. Do you think there is not enough transparency about expectations projected and what the student know about what the program's intentions?
5. Can you describe your relationship with the advisors or counselors in ILP?
6. How would you describe your experience with faculty on this campus and those that taught ILP students?
7. Talk about your relationship with your peers in the ILP program, what your experiences like with them compare to peer in general?

8. How did you communicate parts of the program you had issues with or you thought could be improved?
  
9. In term of the program, were you ever asked or offered platform to voice things that could be improved, either through meetings, or some other avenue?  
  
you think there is anything that stops voicing your input from happening? Do you think there is anything preventing additional suggestions that would improve the program?
  
10. Are you aware of the student equity committee? Have you ever been asked to participate in the committee or told about it at one of your meetings?
  
11. Have you participated in student government? Do you know how to get involved in the process of becoming a student government representative? Were you ever provided a path to do this?

## **Appendix D. General Interview Guide for Coordinator/Advisor Participants**

### **Factors That Shape African American Student Participation Study**

#### **General Interview Guide**

##### **I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background**

###### **Welcome and introduction:**

*Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the interview session, I'd like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research.*

###### **Purpose of the interview:**

*The purpose of this interview is intended to collect information for a research study that examines factors that affect student participation in the Impacted Learner Program. During the interview we will talk about your personal experience as coordinator/advisor in the Impacted Learner Program. I will be recording our interview with a recorder and all your responses will be kept confidential during the entire study. You can stop this interview at anytime if you feel uncomfortable for any reason. Please feel free to ask me any questions about this study.*

###### **Timing:**

*The interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?*

## **II. Interview Session**

### **Main Questions**

#### **Interview Protocol**

1. What is your role? How long have you been at that role? What are/were your key responsibilities in that role?
2. Does or did equity program (Impacted Learner) had a target goal for how many African American student s that you wanted to bring into the program?
3. Who was involved in the collaboration process with Impacted Learner program development?
  - a. Any other groups you can think of that collaborated in the process aside from program coordinators
4. Did Impacted Learner students participate in the collaboration process?
5. Are students involved in planning and providing programmatic awareness such as Martin Luther King day events, Black History Month events, Sickle Cell blood drive, or any other events by Impacted Learner program?
6. Initially there was a student club that provided feedback to program and the manager at the time disallow the coexistence of the club because of programmatic

issue with that set up, How are student offering their opinion or concerns on programmatic changes?

7. Are Curriculum or classes developed around Impacted Learner students such as contextual courses?

If so, did students have input in program's curriculum or class development?

If not, why do you think curriculum or class is not offered?

8. Did students offer suggestions or complaints for program improvement?

How were suggestions or complaints addressed?

9. Are you aware if Impacted Learner students are aware of student equity committee?

10. Do Impacted Learner students serve as student participants on student equity committee?

If not, what is the reason they do not serve as committee members?