COLLEGE COUNSELING DOSAGE AND POSTSECONDARY ACADEMIC
MATCH EXPECTATIONS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Educational Policy – Doctor of Philosophy
Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education – Doctor of Philosophy

2015

ABSTRACT

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In U.S. public high schools, school counselors are tasked with assisting students and their families in the college-going process. This support includes building student college expectations and helping students search for, apply to, and enroll in postsecondary institutions. Even with this formal support, students, particularly those most at-risk, hold lower postsecondary expectations, matriculate to, and persist through higher education in disproportionately low rates. Moreover, when these students do matriculate, they often do so at institutions with less selective enrollment criteria than their academic credentials suggest they would be successful, a phenomenon known as academic undermatch. Using a mixed methods approach, this study seeks to understand how college counseling dosage, as administered primarily by school counselors, influences student postsecondary academic match expectations. Further, this study explores school counselor responsibilities and college counseling beliefs in high-need schools to better understand the context of their college counseling efforts.

To my parents, Gary and Joyce Goodwin, for their sacrifice, steadfast encouragement, and unwavering love.
To my grandparents, Gary and Skip Goodwin, for their generous support, gentle spirits, and enduring love.
To all those I have met along the way who have so greatly impacted my life – thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Burkander, Brian Boggs, Alisha Brown, Tara Kintz, and John Lane, thank you. I cannot imagine a more thoughtful, reliable, loving group of people with whom I would want to take this journey.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of my MSU colleagues who have taught me so much over my five years here. To my friend and statistical go-to, Wei Li, I must thank you heartily for your mentorship and tutoring. I would be lost without your astute analytical guidance and cheerful smile. Additionally, I have thoroughly enjoyed the intellect and generous spirits of my colleagues Rob Shorrette-Remigio, Justina Judy Spicer, Michael Broda, and Justin Bruner.

To the members of my committee and the exceptional faculty in the College of Education at Michigan State University – thank you. Dr. Barbara Schneider, my adviser and dissertation chair, thank you for pushing when others may have relented. Thank you for the opportunity to gain real-world skills alongside my research training. To my co-adviser and co-chair, Dr. Ann Austin, your patient ear and gentle support kept me moving through doctoral work when I wasn't sure I wanted to. Your warmth and kindness are motivating and serve as proof positive that one can be both an intellectual powerhouse and a fundamentally good person. Dr. Michael Sedlak, thank you for taking a risk on me and ensuring that I had the support needed to succeed. You are an unyielding student advocate and a caring, paternal presence among all of the students of the EdPolicy Program. We, and Michigan State, are so very lucky to have you. Dr. Brendan Cantwell, thank you for your mentorship, open-mindedness, and light-hearted, humorous approach to student guidance. Your love for the pursuit of knowledge is contagious; I certainly hope to carry that with me throughout life.

In addition to the support of those in my higher education past, I must also acknowledge the help of those in my near future. To my teammates at the University of Central Florida, and Dr. Beth Barnes in particular, whose kindness and encouragement gave me the motivation to cross the finish line, thank you so much for believing in me. I feel so wonderfully fortunate to begin my career among colleagues and at an institution that most assuredly will expect me to *Reach for the Stars*.

Lastly, to my loving family – thank you. My grandparents have stood so proudly next to me for all of my 29 years, ever-ready to catch me should I fall. Your support and generosity have allowed to take risks and to pursue my own happiness – for that, I am forever thankful. To my parents, thank you for your sacrifice and investment in my education. Mostly, thank you for encouraging me to march to the beat of my own drum, even when you didn't much like the music. I love you more.

To all those above, and countless others along the way, I thank you so dearly for your contributions to my life and to my studies. You have made me love and feel loved. There is no greater gift than this.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Increasing college matriculation, persistence, and graduation are important federal and state policy aims, often framed as essential to maintaining and improving America's global economic competitiveness (Duncan, 2010; Kanter, Ochoa, Nassif, & Chong, 2011; Robert, Davis, James, & Adriel, 2010). While policy and practice initiatives, from standards and curricular changes to professional development and use of data tools, press to produce more college-ready students (Bausmith & Barry, 2011; Callan, Finney, Kirst, Usdan, & Venezia, 2006; Conley, Drummond, De Gonzalez, Rooseboom, & Stout, 2011; Dounay, 2006; Venezia, Callan, Finney, Kirst, & Usdan, 2005), the transition from high school to college remains a pivotal and challenging educational process for students, especially those most at-risk, including low-income, first generation, and minority students, leading to disproportionately low matriculation rates among these groups (Aud & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2013; Choy, 2002; Dynarski & Bailey, 2011; Engle & Tinto, 2008).

At the high school level, school counselors serve to support students in planning for and navigating the college-going process and are an important source of formal college-going assistance within the confines of the school (Hamrick & Hossler, 1996; Horn, Chen, & Chapman, 2003; Springer, Cunningham, O'Brien, & Merisotis, 1998; McDonough 2005a, 2005b, Perna et al., 2008). School counselors are particularly important for low-income and minority students who often have weak personal, social, and educational supports throughout the college-going process (Perna, 2004; Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, 2004; Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002). School counselors help

students search for postsecondary options, complete the application process, seek out

financial aid, make postsecondary choices, complete the necessary steps for actual

enrollment, and serve as a key information source for college-going activities

(McDonough 2004, 2005a, 2005b; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Perna, 2004).

Still, even with the support of school counselors, when at-risk students do enroll

in postsecondary institutions, they often do so at colleges and universities with a lower

level of selectivity than their own academic credentials suggest they would be successful

(Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, & Moeller, 2008;

Smith, Pender, & Howell, 2013), a phenomenon known as academic undermatch. The

phenomenon of postsecondary academic match as an area of research is relatively new;

the first studies on match were conducted by the Consortium of Chicago School Research

in 2008 and 2009 (Roderick, et al., 2008; Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, & Moeller, 2009).

While the work of Roderick et al. (2008, 2009) was not specifically focused on school

counselors, the researchers did assert that school counselors, along with other school

professionals, could impact students' postsecondary match choices by contributing to the

overall college-going climate in schools. Still, while studies on academic match often

discuss the role of college counseling, a review of the literature revealed no studies

specifically examined school counselors' college counseling efforts and their effects on

the postsecondary matching process. Moreover, little is known about the amount of time

school counselors spend on college counseling or about the types of college counseling

activities they engage in (McDonough, 2005). This study aims to bolster the research

base in those areas by exploring the intersection of postsecondary academic match and

the college counseling efforts of school counselors. The study examines the amount of

time school counselors spend on college counseling and how those efforts influence student postsecondary academic match. It examines the college counseling dosage received by students, with specific attention to at-risk characteristics, its influence on student expectations to attain either a two-year or four-year degree, and how that compares to students' own postsecondary eligibility as determined by their performance on a mathematics assessment.

Definition of Terms

Postsecondary Academic Match Expectations

This study defines postsecondary academic match expectations broadly, identifying it as a student's expectation to attain a two-year or four-year degree in comparison to their own likely admission to those institution types. Students whose expectations and academic eligibility align are considered to have matched postsecondary expectations, and those who mismatch are identified as overmatched or undermatched. Precise definitions using the study's measures are further detailed in Chapter 3.

Background of the Problem

While the literature has clearly shown the benefits of attending a two-year college in contrast to attending no college at all, it has also shown that the wage premium on a four-year degree is greater than that of a two-year degree (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Kane & Rouse, 1995; Kolesnikova, 2009; Light & Strayer, 2003). In addition to wage premiums, institutional type appears to have an effect on the likelihood of degree completion; students who enroll at four-year institutions are more likely to complete a four-year degree, and to do it faster, than their similarly situated peers who begin at two-year colleges with the intent to transfer to a four-year institution later (Bowen, et al.,

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2009; Cuccaro-Alamin, 1997; Reynolds, 2012). Recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that individuals who held a bachelor's degree earned more money and saw less unemployment during the last year than those who held a two-year degree, a trend that has generally held true over time and through economic swings, including 2000-2013 (Aud & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2013). For these reasons, it is imperative that we take more seriously student academic match rather than solely emphasizing access and enrollment at any postsecondary institution.

Further, while students and families ultimately make postsecondary choices, school counselors play an integral role in the college-going process, especially among at-risk students. McDonough (2004) makes the case that school counselors are among the most important school-based professionals for improving college-going rates, particularly among at-risk students whose college-going experiences are often beset by inadequate familial knowledge, low postsecondary aspirations, poor college knowledge, and limited educational, personal, and social assets, such as family knowledge and support, characteristics related to students' ability to navigate the complex and disjointed high school to college transition process (Auerbach, 2004; Auerbach, 2007; Choy, 2002; Hoxby & Turner, 2013; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2002). School counselors can impact these weaknesses by sharing college information, communicating with parents regarding their place in the college-going process, supporting academic preparation, assisting student college choice, and providing information about financial aid (Fitzgerald & Delaney, 2002; Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 2005a, 2005b; 2006; St. John, 2003), tasks that are particularly important for at-risk students because they are less likely to have knowledgeable family sources for college information (Auerbach, 2004;

Auerbach, 2007;Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999; Hoxby & Turner, 2013; Perna, 2004; Venezia, A., Kirst, M. & Antonio; 2003).

However, even though school counselors positively influence college-going culture within schools, structural barriers like time constraints and lack of appropriate training may restrict the ability of the typical school counselor to provide college counseling assistance to students, a conclusion that has led several research studies and policy reports to urge for an increase in the amount of time spent on college counseling in schools (Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, 2002; Gandara & Bial, 2001; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; McDonough, 2004). In addition to college counseling, school counselors are also often tasked with offering personal and behavioral counseling, handling attendance obligations, scheduling duties, and administering numerous testing processes (McDonough, 2006; Perna et al., 2008). Further, structural constraints, such as high student-to-counselor ratios, and variations across high schools resulting from external federal, state, and local policy pressures, also hinder school counselors' ability to offer college counseling services (McDonough, 1997; 2005a; Perna et al. 2008; Venezia & Kirst, 2005). Further, while college counseling is widely understood as an obligation of school counselors, often times their degree and certification programs lack specific training in the area, leading to limited counseling knowledge (McDonough, 2005a; 2005b; Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Milde, Leitner, & Skelton, 2006; Perna et al., 2004).

Research Questions

Because of the role school counselors play in the college-going process and the long-term benefits associated with student enrollment at a postsecondary academic

match, this study seeks to examine the following questions: (1) How is college counseling dosage related to student postsecondary academic match expectations? (2) How do structural constraints and professional beliefs influence school counselors' efforts to provide college counseling?

Theoretical Framework

This study principally draws on the work of James Coleman and social capital theory. While human capital evolves from changes within the individual, social capital develops from shifts in social relationships that promote action (Coleman, 1988). Coleman (1988) describes three forms of social capital, including obligations and expectations, information channels, and norms and sanctions, that can be affected by density, intergenerational closure, and trustworthiness. Coleman asserts that obligations and expectations contain two essential elements, the degree of trust in a relationship that obligations will be repaid and the magnitude of those of obligations. He compares obligations owed in social relationships to credit slips – a person who holds a credit slip is owed something by another. In this relationship, it is essential that those with the credit slip trust those who owe to repay it and that they do so when called upon. Information channels, however, are based on the acquisition of information and rely on attentiveness. Coleman argues that, in the case of information channels, social relations are not valuable for their trust or their exchange of obligation, but rather for the information provided. Lastly, norms and sanctions both enable and restrict actions. Norms serve to promote positive external effects and restrict negative effects. In a rural school, for example, it may be an established norm that students attend a local community college. This norm may be reinforced through rewards such as friendship and sanctions such as ostracizing

those pursuing a four-year degree from an elite institution. This norm is reinforced through internal and external rewards and sanctions such as social support and status. Social capital theory is an appropriate frame for this study because it aims to examine whether the relational ties between student and counselor affect students' postsecondary match habits. In particular, this study aims to critically examine information channels between students and counselors and how they are affected by time, norms, and trust.

In the case of student college-going and college transitions, social capital can be understood as the intellectual and human resources gained through interpersonal relationships and connections developed within school and institutional communities. This study examines information channels in particular, as represented by the relationship ties between the student and primarily the school counselor, with attention to other sources as well, to explore at-risk students' acquisition of information related to the college-going process. This study characterizes those relationship ties and the strength of those ties as the amount of time a school counselor spends on college-going activities, how much contact the student reports having with the school counselor, and how those relationship ties influence student expectations for a postsecondary academic match.

Coleman (1988) finds that social capital within the family is related to the physical presence of the parents and the amount of interaction and attention given to a child. When college information sharing external to the school is weak or absent, as is often the case in low-income families (Furstenberg et al., 1999; Perna, 2004), it suggests that these parents are not directly involved in the production of social capital and that the role of the school counselor in establishing this social capital is heightened. School counselors can serve as a partial surrogate source for this essential information and fill

the gaps that familial relationships fail to fill. Even when the parents of at-risk students are supportive of their college ambition, for example, the school counselor may be the key information source for college applications, financial aid processes, and enrollment decisions. In these cases, the counselor provides support to the at-risk student in the same way that a middle- or high-income family provides to their student.

This study hypothesizes that when school and college counselors are successful at forming strong relationships and college-going information channels with students, they create social capital, increasing the likelihood that they hold expectations for a postsecondary academic match. Conversely, when school and college counselors are less successful at establishing relationships and developing college-going information channels, students are more likely to hold expectations for a postsecondary academic mismatch. Establishment of social capital through the school counselor can then be seen as a product of college counseling dosage as administered by the school counselor (and external college counselor), received by the student, and sought out by the student. In this study, dosage is an effect represented by the amount of time the counselor reports spending on college counseling activities and whether or not students report speaking with their school counselor or another college counselor about postsecondary opportunities. The study asserts the combination of those factors is partially representative of the level of trust held in the relationship between the student and the counselor.

Coleman's emphasis on relationships is important for this study because school counselors and students have a clear and significant relational tie. Students share relational ties with lots of people, including family, friends, and other teachers in the

college-going process, but the counselor is a particularly important relationship at the school-level. For at-risk students, this relationship may be particularly important as families may not be able to provide the type, quality, or quantity of information necessary to promote a postsecondary academic match. When this is the case, school counselors can provide college-going information where the family is unable, creating a denser relationship tie around the idea of college-going where the one extending from the family is somewhat thin. It is in this, the strength of the tie, in which social capital is created, which allows students to take action and make choices that increase the potential for a postsecondary academic match. Norms, expectations, and information flow through these ties to produce a productive end, in this case, to produce matched postsecondary expectations.

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model views elements that influence student postsecondary academic match as either background factors or dosage factors. Background factors include school and student-level characteristics such as race/ethnicity, sex, parent education level, student mathematics assessment performance, and the college-going rate of the high school. Dosage factors represent an estimate of the amount and effect of college counseling received by a particular student, and they are generally more action oriented. Student-counselor college-going interactions are measured through three variables, including whether the student spoke to a hired college counselor, whether or not the student met with the school's counselor to discuss options after high school, and an estimate of the percentage of time the counseling staff spends on college counseling activities.

This conceptual model is grounded in Coleman's (1988) social capital theory and elects to operationalize density and closure of relationship ties as college counseling dosage at both the school and individual levels. The model hypothesizes that an increase in college counseling dosage will result in an increase in the likelihood that students hold expectations for postsecondary academic match. The increase in match likelihood is based on the assumption that an increase in college counseling dosage will result in student acquisition of more full and accurate college-going information through strengthened, college-going information channels. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

BACKGROUND	Dosage: Counselor-Student Interactions	OUTCOME
school context (college-going rate) Sex Race/Ethnicity Parent Education level Student Math Assessment Performance	School counselor college counseling time allocation Student-Counselor College Interaction (private and school-based)	More = Academic Matched Expectations Less = Academic Mismatched Expectations

Research Design

Using a mixed methods approach, this study investigates the impact of school counselors' college counseling efforts on at-risk students' postsecondary academic match expectations. First, the study uses a nationally representative federal dataset to employ a hierarchical linear model of student postsecondary expectations and estimates of counselor time allocation on college counseling activities to determine the effect of college counseling dosage on student postsecondary academic match expectations at the school-level. Second, semi-structured interviews with school counselors in high-need

schools were conducted to identify counselors' daily obligations and college-going

beliefs.

Rationale and Significance

The methods used in this study aim to explore various angles of counselor

influence on postsecondary educational attainment expectations and the supports and

barriers counselors meet in providing college counseling services – and ultimately what

that means for students' expectations of a postsecondary academic match. While research

on college-going is abundant, and the study of academic match is growing, the

intersection of match and school counseling is rarer but important. The study of academic

match is important because it is inherently an issue of inequality. Going to and

completing college can be particularly transformative for at-risk students, and research

indicates that enrolling in a postsecondary academic match can improve the odds of

doing so. While multiple school, home, community, institutional, and financial factors

influence students' likelihood to enroll in a postsecondary academic match, the ability of

school counselors to influence at-risk students' enrollment decisions is perhaps unique,

given their status as often the school's only designated professional specifically tasked

with college counseling duties.

In addition to being an issue of inequality, academic match also appears to be a

very solvable issue. Helping students hold matched postsecondary expectations does not

require changes in performance or widespread changes in pedagogical technique or

curricular expectations, as is the case with many issues facing education. Increasing the

rate at which students hold matched expectations is, at its core, an issue of information

exchange. College information is exchanged between students and their school

counselors, a relatively small and captive professional audience. From a practical

perspective, school counselors are an excellent target for improving college information

channels at the school level. School counselors already understand college counseling as

a part of their job duties. They have experience and knowledge of the area, and because

there are only a very small number of school counselors per school or district, costs to

offer professional development, training, education, and oversight is minimal compared

to that of their more numerous teaching counterparts. While a focus on school counselors

and postsecondary academic match expectations alone will not solve the academic match,

access, and completion problems, even a small improvement could positively contribute

to the postsecondary outcomes of thousands of students.

Assumptions and Predictions

The key assumption underscoring this study is that the relationship between the

at-risk student and her school and college counselor matters. The researcher predicts that

the amount of time spent on college counseling at the school-level and received at the

student-level is at least partially representative of the strength of the relationship, and thus

it is positively correlated to student expectations for a postsecondary academic match

among students, especially those displaying risk at-risk factors.

However, it may also be the case that an increase in college counseling dosage

results in a decrease in the rate at which at-risk students match academically. If school

counselors, for example, have inadequate college counseling knowledge, or push students

to certain types of institutions, such as two-year institutions, an increase in college

counseling interaction between those information providers and students might actually

result in a decrease, or net-neutral impact, on postsecondary academic match. While the

researcher predicts a positive correlation between time spent on counseling and academic match, the potential for a negative or neutral correlation is reasonable, thus the impetus for pursuing this study.

Lastly, the researcher assumes a link between student expectations and student action. The researcher assumes that students with mismatched expectations receive little, or little individualized college counseling, leading more often to mismatched expectations, with consequences for students actual matriculation trends. In contrast, the researcher assumes that students with matched expectations are more likely to have received more college counseling and more individualized college counseling, providing them with a more robust information base with which to make decisions. The general assumption then is that more accurately matched expectations have real consequences for students' actual enrollment and completion tendencies.

Conclusion

The remainder of this dissertation explicates in detail the process used to advance understanding of the study's questions. Chapter two will help frame the study in the relevant research. Chapter three will explicate the methods and procedures, chapter four will present the study's findings, and chapter five will discuss implications of the findings for policy and practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study seeks to understand how relationship ties between students and counselors, including communication around the issue of college-going, influences student expectations of a postsecondary academic match. This literature review aims to situate the study in the research on the intersection of school counselors and college-going in the U.S. It explores four major areas of research and data. The first area of research this chapter reviews includes the history of school counseling from profession origins to present. Following, the chapter explores the research and data on school counselors and their role in the college-going process. Next, the chapter explores the most pertinent research and data on college attendance, with attention to differences between groups. Finally, the chapter will provide a review of the research on the benefits of postsecondary attendance. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the literature on postsecondary academic match.

School Counseling: Origins to Present

The origins of school counseling can be traced to the late 1800s and the Progressive Movement (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Pope, 2000). In its infancy, the teacher-led profession was geared more towards vocationalism and served primarily to address the needs and conditions of the young, poor, and those migrating to urban centers and new work environments (Ginn, 1924; Gysbers, 2001). At the time, the profession was associated with the term vocational guidance rather than school counseling, and it functioned in a role more akin to today's conception of career counseling, helping to

guide students into labor and work environments upon exit from the formal schooling

system (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

Vocational guidance was able to cement itself as a permanent fixture within the

educational system with the assistance of psychological testing, then used as a key tool in

the career counseling process (Pope, 2000). In the eyes of the public and other educators,

psychological testing was viewed as a scientific procedure and added legitimacy to an

otherwise unscientific process based more on data gathering through observation,

common sense, and intuition (Pope, 2000). In addition to gaining credence through

science of the time, the vocational guidance movement was also assisted with legislative

support; the Smith-Hughes National Vocational Act of 1917 solidified the connection

between vocational training and formal education, creating vocational secondary schools

for the purposes of vocational training (Pope, 2000).

It was later, around the 1920s, that the role of the school counselor came to be

intertwined with the providing of education guidance and personal developmental

counseling, stemming partially from the influence of John Dewey's cognitive

developmental movement (Gysbers, 2001; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Pope, 2001).

Just as Dewey influenced classroom teachers to concern themselves with the personal,

social, and intellectual development of students, his work also permeated the still young

concept of school guidance. Guidance strategies came to involve strategies meant to

promote student development. Shortly after, during the 1930s, school and guidance

counseling's first theory emerged, known as the trait and factor theory, establishing a

long tradition of academic and scholarly study of its own (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

Still, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, vocational and school guidance activities were typically taken up by teachers, a characteristic increasingly acknowledged as problematic (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). As a result, colleges and universities developed as fertile training grounds for an increasingly professional field and slowly began to train and graduate a labor force ready to begin full-time, non-teaching, specialized work to support student development. Shortly thereafter in the 1950s, other indicators of growing professionalism in the field surfaced, including the formation of the American School Counselor Association Association and the establishment of the professional journal, *School Counselor* (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

The 1950s also brought a more rapid growth in the school counseling labor force as America's Sputnik moment spurred the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958, which aimed to produce a more scientifically and technologically interested student body and labor force. As a part of this national effort, the NDEA included funds to equip postsecondary institutions with the resources necessary to expand and develop school guidance counseling training programs in order to produce a more robust school guidance counseling workforce, tasked with guiding academically successful math and science students into fields of technological innovation (Lambie & Williams, 2004). After decades of growth and maturation within the profession, the 1960s saw the school counseling and guidance profession evolve once more towards a new, broader concept of student support and development. This era focused on comprehensive student development across varying levels of student need, from supporting the high achievers as urged in NDEA, to connecting disadvantaged students to opportunities and providing a

path to meaningful work for people with disabilities (Lambie & Williams, 2004; Pope, 2001).

While the 1950s and 1960s saw a great expansion in the number of school counselors and their responsibilities, the declining student enrollments of the 1970s saw many school districts reduce school counseling staff and augment their role to include additional non-counseling administrative duties (Lambie & Williams 2004). The 1970s also saw school counselors' obligations expand into the area of special education as a result of the Educational Act for All Handicapped Children of 1975 (Lambie & Williams, 2004). This expansion of duties often included taking a role in the individualized education plan (IEP) process, providing placement services, and arranging support services to students with disabilities and their families. The 1980s and 1990s saw school counseling, like virtually every other aspect of schooling, affected by the National Commission of Excellence in Education and its report, A Nation at Risk. The report spurred the accountability movement and saw the day-to-day work and expectations change as a result. It is also during this time that the term "school counseling" became preferred among professional organizations and many of their members (Lambie & Williams, 2004).

School Counseling Today

Today, school counseling stands in stark contrast to its simple, Progressive Era origins. The breadth of responsibilities and coalescence of the school counseling labor force around a professional culture has transformed the day-to-day work of school counselors. Still, counselors and counseling duties often remain left out of modern school reform and policy dictums, such as the standards movement of the 1990s, the federal No

Child Left Behind policy, and the more recent Race to the Top of the Obama administration (Lambie & Williams, 2004; Department of Education, 2010). Because of this policy void, the work and direction of school counselors is heavily influenced by the American School Counselor Association, the dominant school counseling professional association.

To establish an understanding of school counseling work today, this review first examined four American School Counselor Association (ASCA) documents, including student-focused resources, the National Standards for Students (ASCA, 2004) and Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success (ASCA, 2014), and counselor-focused documents, including School Counselor Competencies (ASCA, 2012a) and the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012b).

Student-Focused Documents: National Standards for Students and Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success

The ASCA National Standards for Students and the Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success documents provide school counselors with a guidepost with which to direct school counseling efforts. They set demonstrable skills, knowledge, and attitude outcomes for students who participate in a school counseling program (ASCA, 2014; ASCA, 2004). The documents emphasize three key areas, including academic development, personal/social development, and career and college counseling.

Academic development.

School counselors' efforts to support academic development of students aim to maximize students' learning abilities (ASCA, 2004). The academic development domain consists of three overarching themes including: (1) Acquisition of the knowledge, skills,

and demeanor necessary to support lifelong learning in and out of school; (2) Completion of school equipped with the preparation necessary to support an array of postsecondary options, including college; and (3) An understanding of work, school, and home relationship to academics (ASCA, 204). Counselors support academic development across student types, including those with special needs, through involvement in the creation of individualized education programs (IEPs) (Myrick, 2003; Stone & Dahir, 2006), and gifted students (Peterson & Lorimer, 2011; Wood, 2010). The academic development domain's connection to postsecondary options is key in offering college counseling and supporting students through the college-going process. School counselors provide students with guidance on course selection and academic planning essential to promoting college enrollment (Riegle-crumb, 2006). Counselors also commonly establish peer tutoring programs (Myrick, 2003).

Personal/social development.

The personal/social development domain refers to the counselor role in encouraging personal and social growth for school and beyond. This domain is inclusive of three broad themes including: (1) The acquisition of social skills necessary to encourage students to respect oneself and others; (2) The ability to make decisions and set and achieve goals; and (3) An understanding of safety and survival strategies (ASCA, 2004). ASCA's standards call for counselors to support personal and social development by supporting student acquisition of self-knowledge and interpersonal skills. Additionally, school counselors encourage character development and education (Wittmer & Clark, 2002), and provide individual and group counseling to students on a variety of personal issues, including sexuality and sexual identity (Munoz-Plaza, Quinn,

Rounds, 2002), substance abuse (Lambie, & Rokutani, 2002; Lewis, Dana, & Blevins, 2014), goal setting (Dahir, 2004); and promoting academic and social competencies broadly (Brigman, Webb, & Campbell, 2007).

Career development and college counseling.

The ASCA also emphasizes career development; this reflects the domain most closely associated with the historical origins of school counseling and guidance. This standard underscores the counselor role in promoting the ability for students to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to explore work and self in order to assist in career choice and transition from high school to work, and in between jobs, throughout life (ASCA, 2004). As the national college-going rate hovers near 66% (Snyder & Dillow, 2013), college and career development are inherently intertwined with counselors' college counseling efforts as students with both college and non-college plans consider career options and the education required to reach their goals.

Counselor-Focused Documents: The ASCA National Model and School Counselor Competencies

In addition to the student-centered outcomes discussed above, the ASCA also established a model and competencies for counselors to guide their work in implementing a school counseling program. The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012a) and School Counselor Competencies (ASCA, 2012b) are made up of four main areas, including creation of a school counseling program foundation, use of management tools and strategies that address school needs, demonstration of effectiveness through accountability methods, and delivery of services. While there are four key areas of the

model, delivery defines 80 percent of work in the area. Each competency area is inclusive of the knowledge, abilities and skills, and attitudes necessary to carry out each task.

Research on School Counselor Responsibilities

In addition to the responsibilities outlined by the ASCA, which are the goals for school counselors and school counseling programs, but not necessarily the reality, researchers have studied the tasks and responsibilities of school counselors. Researchers have shed light on the broad range of tasks school counselors regularly engage in, including crisis intervention, suicide prevention, and academic support, like testing administration and class scheduling, in addition to other non-counseling activities like attendance duties and lunch room supervision (Ballar & Murgatroyd, 1999; McDonough, 2005a; McDonough, 2006; Perna et al., 2008; Venezia & Kirst, 2005). School counselors meet these obligations via individual, small group, and large group counseling, and with the collaboration of faculty, staff, and community members (Carpenter, King-Sears, & Keys, 1998; Dahir, Burnham, & Stone, 2009; Riva & Haub, 2004; Schmidt, 2003; Stone & Dahir, 2006). This multitude of responsibilities has resulted in confusion over the role of school counselors (Ballard & Murgatroyd, 1999; Coll & Friedman, 1997; Murray, 1995; Lieberman, 2004).

School Counselors and College Counseling

While the ASCA is concerned with the full breadth and depth of school counseling work, this study emphasizes one component, college counseling, and its effect on student expectations for postsecondary participation. The review of responsibilities above helps to underscore that while this study is about school counselors' college counseling efforts and their impact on student postsecondary choices, school counselors

shoulder a range of responsibilities beyond only college counseling. In fact, only 21 percent of U.S. public high schools have a dedicated college counselor (NACAC, 2006), meaning that nearly 80 percent of high schools rely on generalist counselors to carry out college counseling duties in addition to the other obligations discussed above.

Even so, McDonough (2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2006) argues that school counselors may be the most important school-based professionals available to students in the college-going process. Research indicates that counseling can be an effective means for improving students' postsecondary aspirations, academic achievement, and knowledge of financial aid, but that those improvements are at least in part based on the availability of school counselors (Adelman, 1999; McDonough, 1997; McDonough, 2004; Plank & Jordan, 2001). Additionally, they work both at the individual student-level and at the school-level to influence schools' college-going culture (Fitzgerald & Delaney, 2002; Horn, Chen, & Chapman, 2003; Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 2005a, 2005b; McDonough, 2006; St. John, 2003). Through these efforts, school counselors have also proven effective at increasing the number of colleges that students apply to (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011).

In 2001, Plank and Jordan concluded that the absence of adequate college counseling explains a significant portion of the difference in college enrollment between low-income students and those students in higher income brackets. In addition to being an important contributor to the college-going process, research indicates that high school counselors value and prioritize their role in career, college, and postsecondary planning (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Coll & Freeman, 1997; Dahir, 2004; Dahir, Burnham, & Stone, 2009; Scarbourough, 2005; Schmidt, 2000). Improvements to schools' college

counseling programs have been instrumental at increasing college access among at-risk students, including rural, urban, low-income, and minority students (Gandara & Bial, 2001; King, 1996; McDonough, 2004; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Rosenbaum, Miller, & Krei, 1996; Venezia et al., 2005).

While research has shown the role counselors can play in the college-going process, and components at which they have been successful, studies also show that the constraints placed on school counselors may also hinder their effectiveness as college counselors. Using a descriptive case study approach, Perna et al. (2008), concluded that structural constraints like high student-to-counselor ratios influence counselors' ability to offer an appropriate depth and quality of college counseling to students at the individual level. In 2005, Venezia and Kirst came to a similar conclusion, noting that availability of college counseling varies based on factors including student academic track; they noted that high achieving students, such as those in Advanced Placement courses, have greater access to college counseling services.

Over the course of the last fifteen years, multiple research studies have pointed to dueling problems in providing college counseling: (1) school counselors are constrained by high student-to-counselor ratios; and (2) school and counselor priorities also influence college counseling availability (Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, 2002; Gandara & Bial, 2001; Kirst and Venezia, 2004; McDonough, 2004). As a result, these organizations and researchers have concluded that increasing the number of counselors and boosting the time they spend on college counseling is a necessary reform to improve postsecondary access. The problem of high school counselor ratios has only persisted in spite of researcher recommendations; while the ASCA recommends a student-to-

counselor ratio of 250:1, the school counselor ratio nationally was 471:1 for the 2010-2011 school year, ranging from a low of 200:1 in Wyoming to a high of 1,016 in California State (Keaton, 2012).

College Enrollment in the U.S.

To frame the issues around college-going, it is also necessary to understand current enrollment patterns in the U.S., including who goes, to what institutions, and under what influences and pressures. In 2012, the on-time high school graduation rate increased to its highest level since the 1970s, reaching 80 percent (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014). Despite high school graduation rates reaching historic highs in recent years, just 66.2% of 2012 graduates enrolled in college during the fall immediately following their high school commencement, a fairly substantial decrease from 2009's 70.1% (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014). In 2011, among recent high school completers, 25.9% of students enrolled in a two-year institution while 42.3% enrolled in a four-year institution. However, disaggregating those number shows significant enrollment differences by a variety of student level characteristics, including geographic location, socioeconomic status, first generation status, race, gender, educational aspirations, and a student's overall at-risk status.

Geographic Location

While rural students outperform their non-rural peers on achievement exams and graduate at higher rates than their peers in cities, they enroll at postsecondary institutions at lower rates than their non-rural peers (Aud & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2013). On average, rural students enroll at postsecondary institutions at a clip 10% lower than their non-rural peers (Provasnik, 2007) even though they outperform their non-rural peers on

achievement exams (Aud & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2013). Parents of rural students hold lower educational expectations for their children than do non-rural parents (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001). Additionally, rural students are hampered by lack of physical access and familiarity with postsecondary campuses; research has shown that proximity to postsecondary institutions is associated with an increase in the likelihood that a student applies (Turely, 2009).

Socioeconomic Status

Family income has important implications for nearly every facet of American life and opportunity; access to postsecondary education is no exception. Low socioeconomic status students are less likely to enroll in college immediately after high school graduation (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; St. John, 2003) and are associated with delayed postsecondary entry at disproportionate rates to their middle and high income peers (Aslanian, 2001; Choy, 2001; Choy, 2002; Choy & Bobbit, 2000; Cook & King, 2004; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007). While 81% of students from high income families enroll in a postsecondary institution, only 64.7% of middle income and 50.9% of low income students do the same (Snyder & Dillow, 2013). Lower enrollment among low-income individuals translates to lower degree attainment. Dynarski and Bailey (2011) found that only about 10% of people from low income families have a four-year degree by 25 while half of all people from high-income households do.

First Generation Students

First generation students, those students whose parents have not attended college, are less likely to enroll in a postsecondary institution than those whose parents did attend college. Choy (2001) found that while 82% of non-first generation students enroll in

college, only 54% of those with parents who only had a high school diploma enrolled, and just 36% of those students whose parents had less than a high school diploma enrolled in college immediately after high school graduation. More recent data from 2007-2008 indicate that only 38.1 percent of currently enrolled postsecondary students came from families whose parents had a high school diploma or less (Snyder & Dillow, 2010). Research shows that first generation students often lack crucial college knowledge that assists students in successfully transitioning to postsecondary institutions (Pike & Kuh, 2005). This stems, in part, from the lack of knowledge their parents have regarding the college-going process (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Stephens, Fryber, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012; Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007).

Race and Gender

Race is also associated with college attendance. For example, White students enroll in two- or four-year colleges immediately after high school at higher rates (71.7%) than Blacks (55.7%) and Hispanics (63.9%) (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). Expanding to all college-going, and not just that among recent high school graduates, Asians enroll in postsecondary institutions at the highest rate (81.5%), followed by Hispanics (70.3%), Whites (65.7%), and African Americans (56.4%) (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2012). In addition to having lower overall college-going rates, minority students are also less likely to enroll in selective colleges than their White peers (Current Fry & Taylor, 2013). While over 56 percent of White college students enroll in four year institutions, just over 49 % of Black students and nearly 42 percent of Hispanic students do the same (Fry & Taylor, 2013).

Gender differences present themselves not only in postsecondary enrollment, but in the application process as well. Females are more likely to apply to and enroll in college than their male counterparts (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-Mccoy, 2011; Knapp et al., 2013). Knapp et al. (2013) found that eighty-seven percent of females applied to college while only seventy-nine percent of males did. Further, in the fall of 2012, over 57 percent of students enrolled in postsecondary education were women (Knapp et al., 2013). By age twenty-three, females are 12 percentage points more likely to have attended college than males and more likely to have obtained a four year degree (32 vs. 25 percent) (Deming & Dynarski, 2009). The gender gap is persistent across racial/ethnic groups including, "…Whites (43 vs. 51 percent), Blacks (31 vs. 43 percent), Hispanics (26 vs. 36 percent), American Indians (24 vs. 33 percent), and persons of two or more races (40 vs. 49 percent)" (Ross et al., 2012).

These patterns persist across institutional types as well. For example, at four-year institutions, females represent nearly 56 percent of the student population (Ginder & Kelly-Reid, 2013). At two-year institutions, females represent 57 percent of the student population (Ginder & Kelly-Reid, 2013). Further, while females enroll in postsecondary education in larger numbers, they also graduate at higher rates; in the 2006 entering cohort, for example, women graduated at higher rates than men at public and private two- and four-year institutions. Males only had higher graduation rates at private for-profit institutions (Ginder & Kelly-Reid, 2013).

Current enrollment differences by gender are not an aberration, rather a pattern that has persisted over decades. Female college going rates have outpaced males every year since the early 1980s, when in prior years, males held the postsecondary enrollment

advantage (Ross et al., 2012). The change over time is dramatic – Bailey & Dynarski

(2011) write, "Sex differences in educational attainment, which were small or nonexistent

30 years ago, are now substantial, with women outpacing men in every income group"

(Bailey & Dynarski, p.1, 2011). The trend is predicted to continue in the coming

years. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) predicts that women will

soon account for 59 percent of enrollment in postsecondary education (Hussar & Bailey,

2011).

Education Aspirations

Students' own aspirations, and the encouragement they receive from others, also

contributes to the likelihood of their postsecondary attendance. Studies show that

postsecondary aspirations are affected by the conditions surrounding students, including

family income, student academic achievement, and access to college-going information

(Bers & Galowich, 2002; Butner et al., 2001; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Plank &

Jordan, 2001; Mcdonough, 1997). Still, students today generally hold high postsecondary

aspiration, with 93 percent of high school students reporting postsecondary ambition

(Ross et al., 2012). However, educational aspirations do differ by factors such as race and

gender. For example, nationally, by ninth grade, males hold lower educational

expectations than their female counterparts. Fewer males than females (53 vs. 59

percent) expect to complete a four-year degree or more (Ross et al., 2012). However, the

pattern is not the same across all racial/ethnic groups. White males and females (56 vs.

63) and Black males and females (54 v. 61) hold different educational expectations, but

no differences are apparent for other racial/ethnic groups. Differences are also apparent

in twelfth grade; female high school seniors reported having postsecondary aspirations

more often than males (96 vs. 90 percent) (Ross et al., 2012). Additionally, Black and Asian students hold higher postsecondary aspirations than do their Hispanic and American Indian peers (Ross et al., 2012). Further, while students reported using school staff, relatives, and online resources for college information, females are far more likely to seek out that information than males (Ross et al., 2012). White, Black, and Asian students are also more likely than their Hispanic peers to seek out this information (Ross et al., 2012).

Moreover, the disjuncture between student postsecondary ambition and student postsecondary enrollment is significant, signaling issues in the college-going process. Misalignment between ambition and action was first acknowledged by Schneider & Stevenson (1999). Schneider & Stevenson found that students hold aspirations without understanding the pathways necessary to reach those goals, and this is often a result of a lack of information regarding the college-going process. This aspiration-to-action gap is important to the thrust of this study, which inquires into the alignment of ambition and ability, with possible implications for actual enrollment.

At-Risk Students

The characteristics described above can all individually contribute to a students' at-risk status, in addition to a wide range of other factors. At-risk status can include background characteristics (such as age, socio-economic status, race, gender, cultural barriers, language barriers, technology proficiency), internal characteristics (weak self-concept, misaligned goals, interest), and environmental factors (learning environment, academic support, guidance counseling, travel time) (Astin, 1982; Chen & Kaufman, 1997; McCabe, 2003; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999).

These at-risk characteristics frequently influence the college-going process. Research has shown that race/ethnicity, gender, educational expectations, prior academic achievement, parent involvement, college knowledge, knowledge of costs and financial aid, support from school staff, including guidance counselors, as well as the overall context of the high school, all impact college-going (Bryan et al., 2011; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000, 2001; Conley, 2008; McDonough, 2005; Perna, 2000,2006, 2008; Perna et al., 2008; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell). At-risk students receive less family support when applying to college, lack crucial college knowledge, are less academically prepared, have less information about college life, and are less informed about financial aid (Choy, 2001; Schneider, Broda, Judy, & Burkander, 2013; Vargas, 2004). On average, at-risk students do not have the same levels of social capital and support as other students, resulting in a deficiency of experience and knowledge related to the college-going process, contributing to lower postsecondary enrollment rates (Roderick, Nagoaka, Coca, & Moeller, 2008).

Benefits of Postsecondary Attendance

While college counseling is just one of many duties placed on the shoulders of school counselors, improving college-going rates, particularly among at-risk students, is a current education policy and political interest so significant that it has emerged from the shadows of research journals to appear in more mainstream media formats, including the *New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, and *Forbes Magazine* (Perez-Pena, 2014; Sherman, 2015; Worland, 2014). In addition to rumblings in the media, President Obama's 2020 College Completion Goal includes the ambition to increase the U.S. college attainment rate to number one in the world by 2020 (Katner, Ochoa, Nassif, & Chong, 2011). Part of

this goal includes raising college completion rates specifically among low-income individuals.

Policy and political attention on college-going, and preparing students to be successful in college, have likely received more attention than other functions of counselors because of the long-term economic impacts on postsecondary credential attainment. The benefits of postsecondary education are wide ranging, impacting many areas of life, and extend throughout a person's lifetime (Bowen, 1997; McPherson & Shapiro, 1997). Attainment of a postsecondary credential is associated with positive outcomes including increased earnings, increased happiness in the workplace, lower unemployment, decreased incarceration, positive health benefits, increased enrollment in health insurance, increased life expectancy, and decreased reliance on public assistance (Baum & Payea, 2004; Bowen, 1997; Perna, 2005). Still, researchers point to a wide gap between those benefits and those able to take advantage of them; Carnevale and Desrocher (2003) predict a shortage of 14 million college-educated workers by 2020.

More nuanced research has also shown increased benefits to longer postsecondary coursetaking and credentialing programs. In a recent, first of its kind study on labor market returns to sub-baccalaureate credentials, using a fixed effect model, Dadger & Trimble (2014) found that attainment of short-term certificate programs at community colleges do not yield particularly robust economic returns, but long-term certificates and associate's degrees prove to produce higher labor market returns. While returns differ by field and also by gender, the average trends are clear: attainment of a full associate's degree will, in comparison to shorter-term credentials, yield higher economic returns in the long run.

While the literature has shown the benefits of attending a two-year college in contrast to attending no college at all, it has also shown that the wage premium on a four-year degree is greater than that of a two-year degree (Light & Strayer, 2003). In addition to wage premiums, institutional type appears to have an effect on likelihood of degree completion. Bowen et al. (2009) found that students who enroll at four-year institutions are more likely to complete a four-year degree, and to do it faster, than their similarly situated peers who begin at two-year colleges with the intent to transfer to a four-year institution later. Further, recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that individuals who hold a bachelor's degree earned more money and saw less unemployment during the last year than those who held a two-year degree, a trend that has generally held true over time and through economic swings, including 2000-2013 (Aud & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2013).

Postsecondary Academic Match

The research and policy focus on increasing college attendance and completion, because of the benefits associated with it, is tightly linked to the final component of this study – postsecondary academic match expectations. Proponents of increasing the rate at which students academically match assert that it is not just college that produces benefits, but that certain types of postsecondary institutions are more likely to produce graduates, and graduates with greater benefits, than other institutional types. While the idea of postsecondary academic match is a relatively new area of study, it has received significant attention. There are currently four primary studies examining the rates at which students undermatch. Roderick et al. (2008) conducted a study and concluded that

nearly 61% of students academically undermatch. In a study using a regional data set, Bowen et al. found that nearly 40 percent of students academically undermatch.

Similarly, Smith, Pender, and Howell (2012) concluded that just over 40 percent of students undermatch. They found that likelihood of undermatch is related to some of the characteristics described above, including income and race. Their study showed that low-income students are more likely to undermatch than middle and high income students, and that white students are more likely to undermatch than their Black and Asian peers. Hoxby and Avery (2012) were able to show that the phenomenon of undermatch begins prior to the postsecondary decision; high achieving, low-income students do not just fail to enroll in academic matches as frequently as their peers, but they frequently fail to even apply. Just 8% of high achieving, low income students apply to a similar range of selective schools as their high income peers (Hoxby & Avery, 2012).

However, one study by Hoxby and Turner (2012) concluded that some differences in application behaviors can be ameliorated with intervention. Using a randomized control trial, the study provided students with semi-customized information on college applications and costs, and it provided application fee waivers to students. Students who participated in the intervention were more likely to apply to, be accepted at, and enroll in more colleges generally - and more selective colleges –specifically. Benefits persisted through the first-year of college as these students earned equivalent grades when compared to students in a control group attending less selective institutions (Hoxby & Turner, 2012)

Conclusion

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School counselors shoulder a broad range of responsibilities, ranging from supporting the personal to the academic development of students. They carry out those responsibilities for an increasingly large number of students and receive little direction from the policy reforms that seem to dictate so much of schooling today. Still, some of their duties, namely those that relate to college counseling, have outcomes of particular interest to individuals, the public, and policymakers. In particular, the economic and societal benefits stemming from well-educated individuals and a well-educated citizenry are important outcomes of school counseling and public education. It is in the benefits of postsecondary education, and the differences in those benefits related to institutional type, that this study rests. The following chapter discusses the methods that this study relied on to pursue those ideas.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS & PROCEDURES

Using a mixed methods approach, this study investigates the impact of college counseling interactions on at-risk students' postsecondary academic match expectations. First, the study employs a hierarchical linear model (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) to analyze student postsecondary expectations and interactions within and out of school college counseling activities to determine the effect of college counseling on student postsecondary academic match expectations. This analysis is primarily concerned with the first research question, which states: How is college counseling dosage related to student postsecondary academic match expectations? Second, semi-structured interviews with school counselors were conducted to identify counselors' daily tasks and responsibilities, college-going beliefs, and college counseling efforts in more depth. This analysis is primarily concerned with the second research question, which states: How do structural constraints and professional beliefs influence school counselors' efforts to provide college counseling? Following, this chapter discusses the sample, instruments and data collection procedures, measures, and the analytic plan for both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Quantitative Methods –How is College Counseling Dosage Related to Student Postsecondary Academic Match Expectations?

A hierarchical linear model was used to conduct the quantitative analysis. Data manipulation was conducted in Stata 13 software, and final execution of the model was conducted in Hierarchical Linear and Nonlinear Modeling 7 (HLM 7) software.

Hierarchical linear modeling was chosen to account for the nested nature of the data as students are individuals nested within schools (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

Sample

The quantitative analysis relies on the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLS:09), a National Center for Education Statistics study. HSLS:09 relied on a stratified random sampling to recruit schools and a random sampling of students for all student level data (Ingels et al., 2011). HSLS:09 includes data from several instruments, and this study extracts data from a subset including the student questionnaire, student assessment, school counselor survey, and parent questionnaire. The student survey offers a nationally representative sample of over 23,000 9th graders from nearly 1,000 public and private high schools who were first surveyed in the fall of 2009, and the survey was repeated during the First Follow-up in the spring 2012 with the same cohort of students. The HSLS:09 study aims to provide information and context to students' secondary, postsecondary, and workforce experiences, plans, and patterns (Ingels et al., 2011). See Table 1 for response rates for each instrument used in the quantitative analysis, retrieved from the HSLS base year and first follow-up data files and documentation (Ingels et al., 2011).

Table 1: Summary of HSLS Response Rates

Instrument	Eligible	Participated
School[BY]	1,889	944
Student Questionnaire[FF]	25,184	20,594
Counselor Questionnaire	944	852
Mathematics Assessment[FF]	25,184	18,507
Parent Questionnaire[BY]	11,952	8,651

[BY] Data from base-year.
[FF] Data from first follow-up.
Source: U.S. Department of Education, national Center for Education Statistics. High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLS:09) Base Year and U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLS:09) First Follow-up.

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The analytic sample is restricted to data from public schools in the general sample (N=766). Since one counselor from each school is represented in the counselor data, there are 766 counselors in the counselor portion of the quantitative sample. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for the students in the quantitative analytics sample.

Table 2: Quantitative Analytic Sample Descriptive Statistics

	Percent
Male	49.99
Female	50.01
Hispanic	15.89
White	55.44
Black	10.42
Race – Other	18.23
Parent Ed </=HS	47.92
Parent Ed >HS <4year	20.56
Parent Ed >4yr degree	31.52

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Key variables were retrieved from the HSLS 2009 student survey, mathematics assessment, parent survey, counselor survey, administrative data, and they include student race and ethnicity, sex, parent education level, and math quintile score as background characteristics.

Students completed the student questionnaire via online applications and follow-up was conducted via phone for those who failed to complete the instrument online. Students participating in the questionnaire were also eligible to participate in the mathematics assessment, which was administered online and aims to predict student readiness for further postsecondary education and careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Ingels et al., 2011). The counselor questionnaire was administered to the lead counselor in each high school in the general sample. Counselors responded to questions addressing their job responsibilities, as well as issues of school

academic and college-going climate. Lastly, the parent questionnaire was administered to one parent or guardian for each student in the sample, and each respondent could complete surveys via web-based systems or via phone. Student and school IDs in the dataset were used to link students and counselors to schools in order to study the effects of school counselor college counseling efforts and their interactions with individual students on postsecondary expectations for academic match. Measures used in this analysis were all retrieved from the HSLS 2009 data set and include student and school-level variables. All variables, their sources, and descriptions are available in Appendix A.

Dependent Measures Dependent measures include student match or mismatched postsecondary expectations, divided into three groups, including matched postsecondary expectations, undermatched postsecondary expectations, and overmatched postsecondary expectations. These three dependent measures comprise two merged variables, including student math quintile score (X2TXMQUINT) and student expectation of educational achievement (X2STUEDEXPCT).

Because student-level ACT/SAT data are not yet available for this dataset, the analysis instead relied on an HSLS administered mathematics testing instrument to ascertain student academic ability, admissibility, and readiness for postsecondary education. The HSLS technical guide (Ingels et al., 2011) indicates that the mathematics assessment is intended to assess a student's readiness to pursue a STEM-related postsecondary education. Use of mathematics assessment performance for the purpose of establishing readiness beyond the STEM fields is backed by research which indicates that high school mathematics performance is a strong predictor of four-year degree completion (Adelman, 1999; Trusty & Niles, 2003; Zelkowski, 2008), making this

variable particularly important in defining educational match potential within the confines of the dataset.

The student math quintile score variable is categorical and includes five options in the dataset which were collapsed into two categories for this analysis, those scoring in the lower two-fifths of assessment takers, and those scoring in the highest three-fifths of test takers. This separation point was designated to approximate the percentage of students who enroll in a postsecondary institution immediately following their high school graduation (66%) (Aud et al., 2013). However, because this study is focused on academic match between two and four-year institutions, and the four-year college-going rate immediately after high school is nearer 40%, the researcher also ran the model with a different separation point, between the top two-fifths and the bottom three-fifths of scorers to simulate the breakdown between four-year enrolled students and others. Because there were no statistically significant differences between the models, this study will only present the results of the established 60% match separation point, operating under the assumption that more students are academically eligible to attend a four-year institution than actually enroll due to limitations such as cost and other nonacademic factors, making it the preferable match or mismatch separation point for the purposes of this study.

As actual postsecondary enrollment data were not available at the time of this analysis, the researcher used students' expectations of educational attainment as a second category to build the dependent measure. The student expectations variable has 13 categories in the dataset, but those were collapsed into three categories for this analysis, including students who expected to attain a high school education or less, students who

expected to attain more than a high school education but less than a four-year degree, and those students who expected to earn a four-year degree or more.

These two separate variables were then merged in the following way to create three possible outcome measures:

1.) The first dependent variable is student matched postsecondary expectations. This identifies if a student's expectations for educational attainment match those that would be predicted by their math assessment quintile score. Those students in the lower two quintiles (i.e. low performing students), with educational expectations of less than a four-year degree, are considered to have matched postsecondary expectations. Additionally, those students in the top three quintiles of mathematics performance, who expect to earn a four-year degree or higher, are also considered to have matched performance and expectations for postsecondary attainment.

2.) The second dependent variable option includes student undermatched postsecondary expectations. Student undermatch describes students with high academic performance but low expectations for postsecondary educational attainment. This variable includes those students in the top three quintiles of mathematics assessment performance who only expect to achieve an education level of less than a four-year degree.

3.) Lastly, overmatch is the third dependent variable option. It describes students with low academic performance but high educational

attainment expectations. This dependent variable includes all those

students with a math quintile performance in the lower two quintiles

but who expect to achieve a four-year education or more.

Distributions by match, undermatch, and overmatch among students in the analytic

sample are shown in Table 3 on the following page. The table shows significant

differences between match, undermatch, and overmatch groups for each variable.

Student-Level Independent Measures

Independent measures comprise eight student and school level covariates that

condition the model on school and student background characteristics and college

counseling dosage. The first independent variable (X1SEX), sex of the student, is a

binary variable included to condition for gender effects because women significantly

outnumber men in postsecondary enrollment across race and across institutional types

(Aud & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2013; Ginder & Kelly-Reid, 2012; Ross et al., 2012).

Race/ethnicity is a categorical variable in the dataset (X1RACE) consisting of 8

categories. The researcher collapsed these categories to 4 for data analysis, including

White (the reference category), Hispanic, Black, and Other. Race was included as a

covariate because enrollment data indicates that student postsecondary enrollment varies

greatly by race (Aud & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2013). In particular, Black and Hispanic

students enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates than their White peers (Aud &

Wilkinson-Flicker, 2013; Carnevale & Rose, 2003; Fry, 2011).

Table 3: Distributions by Match, Undermatch, and Overmatch in the Analytic Sample

	Match	Undermatch	Overmatch
Female	59.70	25.15	15.15
Male	64.45	16.50	19.05
White	64.72	20.80	14.49
Black	50.47	16.68	32.85
Hispanic	52.30	28.00	19.71
Race-Other	69.21	17.00	13.78
Parent Ed HS or Less	53.09	27.46	19.45
Parent Ed >HS <4year	59.63	21.08	19.29
Parent Ed >4yr degree	77.3	10.56	12.11
Parent Ed Expect HS or Less	42.9	39.85	17.21
Parents Expect >HS <4year	50.74	30.58	18.69
Parents Expect >HS <4year	66.46	16.78	16.76

Values are a percent of each variable.

A chi square test for each row indicated significant differences between all groups at p<0.05

The model also conditions on factors related to students' parents. The HSLS variable X1PAR1EDU, a categorical variable with seven options, was used to identify the highest level of education completed by a student's parents. It serves to condition for the influence of parent education on student postsecondary education expectations and to approximate student socioeconomic status, factors that contribute to students' college-going and college expectation patterns (Aud & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2013; Choy, 2002). The researcher collapsed the seven available categories into three, including attaining a high school education or less, having more than a high school education but less then a four-year degree, and holding a four-year degree or more. In addition to parent education level, variable X2PAREDEXPCT was used to condition for the effect of a parent's educational expectations for their student. The raw variable contains 13 categories in the dataset, but it was collapsed into three categories for purposes of this analysis, including those parents who expect their student to attain a high school education or less, parents who expect their student to attain more than a high school education but less than a four-year degree, and parents who expect their student to attain a four-year degree or greater.

Further, two student-level variables were used to assess a student's use of college counseling resources, one inside and one outside the confines of the school. S2TALKHSCNSL is a binary variable that indicates whether or not a student spoke about postsecondary plans with a school counselor. Similarly, S2TALKCLGCNSL is a binary variable that indicates whether or not a student discussed postsecondary plans with a hired college counselor. These covariates contribute to college counseling dosage measures in addition to one school-level dosage variable discussed below.

School-Level Independent Measures

In addition to student-level measures, two school-level measures were also used to identify a school's college-going culture because high school context, including college-going culture, have been shown to influence student college-going patterns (Engberg & Wolniak, 2010). One of these measures is the school's college-going rate (A2HIGHERED), a continuous variable that identifies the rate at which school graduates enter postsecondary education. Additionally, the second measure comprises three variables that identify the estimated percent of hours each school's lead counselor spends on college counseling activities. This measure was derived from the variable (C1HRSCOLLEGE) in the HSLS 2009 data set, which consists of 5 categories, and was collapsed into 3 categories (20% of time or less, 21-49% of time, and greater than 49% of time). The lowest estimate (20% of time or less on college counseling) was used as the reference group.

Missing Values and Weighting Procedures

Missing values were excluded from the dependent measures. Among independent measures, four covariates held missing values at the final level of analysis (talked to school counselor, talked to hired counselor, counselor hours estimate, school college-going rate). For these covariates, the missing indicator method was used to check the effect of missingness. Using the missing indicator method, all missing values were set to zero, and a dummy variable was added to the model to identify whether or not value for that variable is missing. Then, all zero values in the data were imputed using a simple imputation method in which all zero values were set to the average for that variable. The model was then executed with flagged variables included, allowing the researcher to

assess the impact of missing data on each estimate. While this method was applied to include missing values in the final analysis, the missing data totals were quite small, suggesting that the analysis is not significantly impacted by their inclusion of exclusion. Table 4 identifies each variable that had missing values and the percent missing for each measure. The student-level covariates, talked to school counselor and talked to hired counselor, were missing just slightly more than 1% of data. The school-level covariate hours estimate had 13.72% missing, and the school college-going rate covariate had a just over 25% missing.

Table 4: Measures With Missing Values

Measure	Percent Missing
Talked with School Counselor	1.06%
Talked with Hired Counselor	1.02%
Counselor Hours Estimate	13.72%
School College-Going Rate	25.09%

In addition to accounting for missing values, the researcher employed a weighting strategy for student-level data. Following the guidelines of the HSLS 2009 technical manual, the researcher used the variable W2STUDENT to weight the data (Ingels et al., 2011). The HSLS 2009 technical manual explains that this weighting variable is used to adjust "for school-level nonresponse in the base year and student non-response in the base-year and first-follow-up (Ingels et al., 2011 p.100).

Analytic Plan

Quantitative analysis relied on a hierarchical linear model to account for nesting effects of the students being in schools and to address the categorical nature of the independent variable (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Using the dependent measures described above, the model was used to identify whether contextual characteristics and

college counseling dosage were conditions of student postsecondary match expectations. The model was built on the assumption that as college counseling interactions increase at the school and individual level, expectations for a postsecondary academic match also increase, even when conditioning on personal, educational, and background characteristics like parent education level, parent expectations, race, and gender. The model conditions on characteristics that the literature indicates are important in the college-going process while emphasizing the relationship ties between the school counselor and the student. The model aimed to evaluate whether differences in levels of college counseling dosage play an important role in student expectations of a postsecondary academic match.

The HLM (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) shows that the level-1 model consists of all weighted student level variables where η is the log odds ratio of student m in school i in match level j (match, undermatch, overmatch) as a condition on the remaining student-level covariates:

Where the level 1 model is:

Prob [Overmatch (1)= 1| β] = P(1)
Prob [Undermatch (2)= 1|β] = P(2)
Prob [Match (3)= 1|β] = P(3) = 1 - P(1) - P(2)

$$\eta_{mij} = \beta_{0(1)} + \beta_{1(1)} + \beta_{2(1)} + \beta_{3(1)} + \beta_{4(1)} + \beta_{5(1)} + \beta_{6(1)} + \beta_{7(1)} + \beta_{8(1)} + \beta_{9(1)} + \beta_{10(1)} + \beta_{11(1)} + \beta_{12(1)}$$

Whereas the level-2 model contains all school-level variables:

$$\beta_{0(1)} = \gamma_{00(1)} + \gamma_{01(1)} + \gamma_{02(1)} + \gamma_{03(1)} + \gamma_{04(1)} + \gamma_{05(1)} + \upsilon_{0(1)}$$

Together, the levels identify the school and student level conditions that influence students' expectations for a postsecondary academic match.

Qualitative Methods: How do Structural Constraints and Professional Beliefs

Influence School Counselors' Efforts to Provide College Counseling?

Interviews with school counselors were conducted to explore school counselor duties and how they may impact the ability for school counselors to provide college counseling services to students. Interviews started with counselor background information, followed by a discussion over a pre-determined set of responsibilities, including scheduling, testing, discipline, IEP and 504 plans, crisis management, and college counseling, and concluded with a discussion about hypothetical adjustments to their responsibilities and work organization, and how that might influence their school and their responsibilities. Interviews aimed to tease out those duties school counselors saw as most essential, most enjoyable, and which they saw as unrelated to the work of school counselors.

Qualitative Sample

Selected schools are current partners in a quasi-experimental study called the College Ambition Program (CAP) that aims to improve schools' college-going culture. CAP provides schools with a site coordinator, a part-time employee who plans and provides services in four areas, including college visits, financial aid, college and course counseling and advising, and mentoring and tutoring. Site coordinators work in conjunction with school counseling staff throughout the year and are encouraged to build strong relationships to provide effective services. This relationship was key to enlisting participants in the proposed study.

Participants in the qualitative sample are all school counselors at one of the 13 high-need urban and rural CAP schools that serve predominantly at-risk, low-income and

minority students and are located in a Midwestern state. Urban schools serve predominantly low-income, minority students, and rural schools serve primarily low-income, majority students. In total, the researcher was able to acquire interest from 11 counselors in 7 of the schools. The researcher elected to interview all willing participants rather than limit participation to just one representative per school. While this may be understood as a limitation due to imbalanced representation at the school-level, it allowed for deeper investigation into some school sites and a wider range of individual experiences.

All school counselors in each participating CAP school were contacted via email by the researcher (See Appendix B for text of the email). The email contained the participant information and consent form (Appendix C) for participant review before the interview took place. At the beginning of each recorded interview, participants were provided with a summary of the study and asked a series of questions to verbally acknowledge that they had read the consent form, agreed to participate, and agreed to be recorded. The researcher also asked school site coordinators to follow up with school counselors to encourage them to participate in interviews. Participant profiles below overview relevant personal, educational, and professional background characteristics that were discussed during interviews and will provide context to qualitative findings discussed in the following chapter.

Participant Profiles

1. Cookie Flanigan has been a school counselor for eight years in a rural high school. In college she intended to go into law enforcement, but she realized the field was not for her and instead pursued a major in sociology. Following, she pursued a master's

in counseling at a private, regional university, assuming she would enter the field of mental health counseling. After obtaining her master's degree, she continued her education, working to earn a certificate in school counseling. After a few major relocations, Cookie finally settled at her current location. She felt that her education prepared her well to handle crises and emotional health situations, but she did not feel prepared by her formal education training for the college and career counseling aspect of her job.

2. Elliot Ogroman is a veteran high school counselor in an urban high school. Elliot comes from an at-risk background and began his educational career with the intent to work in juvenile justice. After discussing his interests in working with troubled youth and in coaching with someone during his undergraduate studies, he was convinced that school counseling would allow him the opportunity to work in both areas. He pursued his master's degree in K-12 school counseling immediately after completing his undergraduate work in juvenile justice. He is currently employed at the same school at which he began his career as a school counselor. Elliot found his education background beneficial to the work he does each day, but he was also frustrated that school counselors see students less frequently and do more administratively than he understood during his degree program. Overall, his motivation to pursue school counseling as a professional field is supported by his motivation to give back and be the kind of school-based support to students that he felt helped steer him to the right path.

3. Della Dunkel is relatively new to school counseling and was an elementary school teacher prior to her transition to school counseling. She splits her time as a counselor between an elementary school in the district and the high school. Della earned

her bachelor's degree from a selective public research university in the state and earned her master's in school counseling at a private, regional university. She felt that her graduate work in school counseling prepared her very well to be a school counselor, but she left with a different assumption of what the day-to-day responsibilities of a school counselor are. Della is frustrated by the high level of administrative work she must tend to and would prefer to work more frequently with students.

4. Grace Otvoren is a veteran teacher turned school counselor in the last ten years. She found that her favorite part of teaching was making strong connections with students and, after years of teaching, felt like a career change to counseling would allow her to focus on her favorite part of teaching. She attended an elite four-year institution in the state for her undergraduate work in English and history and a public regional institution for her master's degree in school counseling. She had a different perception of the day-to-day work of a school counselor while completing her degree program. She expected the job of a school counselor to be very proactive, but she actually finds herself restricted by time limitations and administrative responsibilities. Because of these restrictions, she feels more reactive than proactive. Like others, she felt that her education prepared her to do the job she should be doing, but that it was less comprehensive in preparing her for the administrative components of the job.

5. Pattie Van Cartier is a veteran school counselor who entered the school counseling profession after several career changes. She obtained her bachelor's degree in English from an elite public institution and later pursed a master's in education from an elite private institution. She followed that with a master's in counseling from the same institution. Pattie felt that her master's degree in counseling was tremendously helpful in

preparing her to be a school counselor. She was motivated to pursue school counseling after reflecting on her own experience with school counseling as a student and finding it inadequate. Pattie hoped to meet the needs of more students than her own school counselor, who she felt only focused on encouraging students to attend a four-year institution.

6. Mandy Sazet is a veteran school and professional counselor who works in a rural high school and also practices in a clinical setting. She obtained an undergraduate degree in business from a small, religious college and a master's in school and professional counseling from a public, regional institution. Before pursuing her master's degree, Monica taught briefly. Monica felt very strongly that her master's in school and professional counseling adequately prepared her to become a school counselor, but she also feels limited by the time constraints she faces.

7. Stephanie Sretan comes from a family of educators and counselors. Due to her exposure to the profession growing up, she always thought of school counseling as a potential profession. After obtaining an undergraduate degree in secondary education from a regional public university, she taught English for five years before quitting to pursue a master's in school counseling from a public regional university. Shortly after, she began work at the rural high school she is currently employed by. Stephanie was somewhat disappointed in the preparation she received in graduate school because she felt it prepared her to do counseling well, but it did not prepare her well to do school counseling, which she sees as two different things. She felt unprepared for the non-counseling administrative work and that she needs more background in school law, finance, and education policy.

8. Lucas Waldorf is a veteran school counselor who was motivated to become a school counselor by his own meetings with his high school counselor. Although rare, he left meetings with his high school counselor with the impression that it would be an enjoyable career. After bouncing around educationally in undergrad, Lucas earned his bachelor's degree in business education. Following, he worked part-time while earning a master's in school counseling from a public regional university. While he thought his counseling degree was beneficial, he reflected that it could have been improved with an added experiential component. He felt that the degree prepared him more for what graduate school counseling programs think school counseling is and not necessarily what it actually is. He stated that there was not any preparation in his program for the majority of what he does as a school counselor each day, referencing administrative tasks like test coordination and scheduling processes. He did think it prepared him to build relationships with students, earn their trust, and connect them with resources they need to support their development.

9. Rhoda Zalitise is a veteran educator and school counselor in an urban school district. She decided in high school to pursue a career in education, and after noticing the needs of her students during several years as an English teacher, she decided to pursue a graduate degree in school counseling. Rhoda completed her undergraduate work at a selective regional public university and her master's degree at a for-profit institution. She did not feel that her formal school counselor training prepared her well to be a school counselor. Rhoda felt that her graduate counseling program taught her about comprehensive guidance and preparing well-rounded individuals, but she does not see the

opportunity to do that in the current public school environment due to non-counseling responsibilities like test coordination and scheduling duties.

10. Raquel Zahvalan has had several career moves throughout her life. She entered the school counseling profession in the last five years and works in an urban district. However, she is only in her first year as a high school counselor after spending the first five at the middle school level. She has found the transition frustrating at times, feeling that too much of her time is dedicated to non-counseling administrative tasks that she did not experience at the middle school level. After making major and institution changes during her undergraduate tenure, she graduated with a bachelor's in communications from a selective public institution in the state. She returned to school to pursue a master's in counseling over 25 years later and felt that her formal education in counseling prepared her better to be a middle school counselor than a high school counselor.

11. Savannah Midland is a young school counselor in an urban school. She pursued an undergraduate degree in psychology from a regional public university and came into school counseling through a volunteer program. After one year of service in her school's guidance center, she was hired as an employee and later started her graduate work in counseling at a nearby regional university. Savannah has found that her hands on experience prior to her graduate program has been more valuable to her than the actual graduate work because many of the classes are not specific to counseling in the school setting. She enjoys the "helping" aspect of school counseling and sees work as a school counselor as more about offering social/emotional support services to students than it is about transcripts and career and educational guidance.

Table 5 below provides data on the school-level characteristics represented by each participant. Schools vary in size from around 300 to over 1,000, have high rates of students accessing free and reduced price lunch services, and have a range of ACT and college-going rates.

Table 5: Counselor and School Qualitative Sample

	Gender	Urban/Rural	School Size+	Graduation Range*	College-Going Rate*	FRPL*	ACT Average
Cookie	Female	Rural	300	80-85	50-55	60-65	18
Elliot	Male	Urban	650	55-60	55-60	55-60	16
Grace	Female	Rural	450	90-95	70-75	65-70	20
Della	Female	Rural	450	90-95	70-75	65-70	20
Raquel	Female	Rural	1000	65-70	70-75	60-75	17
Lucas	Male	Urban	1000	65-70	70-75	60-75	17
Pattie	Female	Rural	600	85-90	60-65	70-75	20
Rhoda	Female	Urban	1000	65-70	70-75	60-75	17
Stephanie	Female	Rural	600	85-90	60-65	70-75	20
Savannah	Female	Urban	600	75-80	40-45	65-70	15
Mandy	Female	Rural	500	60-65	45-50	80-85	14

+Rounded to the nearest hundred to maintain privacy
*Ranges are provided to maintain the privacy of the schools and participants.
Source: mischooldata.org
FRPL = Free and Reduced Price Lunch

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

After establishing interest in participation via email, interviews were conducted in a private location at a school site, typically the office of the participating counselor, lasted approximately 60-90 minutes, and were be transcribed by an external transcription provider. Interviews aimed to better understand the daily responsibilities and obligations

of school counselors. The interview process focused on school counselor responsibilities demonstrated in the literature, including those identified as structural constraints to counselors' ability to provide college counseling, in an effort to better understand counselor time use as it relates to college counseling.

Interviews probed counselors about their decision to become school counselors, their daily tasks, time-spent estimates for particular responsibilities (including scheduling, testing, discipline, crisis management, social/emotional support services), their role in individual education planning processes, and their postsecondary planning efforts. Additionally, interviews discussed participant thoughts on counselor training, including areas of strength and weakness in their own preparation. Interviews helped clarify the tasks that counselors engage in, how they felt about those tasks, what they believe school counseling should emphasize, and how responsibilities impact their ability to provide college counseling services. See Appendix D for the interview protocol.

Analytic Plan

Qualitative interviews were semi-structured and conducted only with high school counselors, solely by the author. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by an external transcription service provider. Following transcription, all interviews were analyzed using NVivo for Mac, a mixed method coding software, by the author. Interviews were coded for themes related to counselor job responsibilities, beliefs about postsecondary attendance, time spent on college-going, and the role of the school counselor in the college-going process, in addition to themes that developed throughout the coding process. Themes were coded using an axial coding framework whereby the themes emerge in relation to each other and the phenomenon under study (Strauss &

Corbin, 1998), in this case, counselor responsibilities and efforts and beliefs about their role in the college counseling process. The first round of analysis yielded nodes, or first-pass themes which were then collapsed into broader themes and sub-themes, or excluded based on their low-frequency, low intensity, or disconnectedness from the research question. In total, the final analysis consisted of two major themes including (1) counselor job responsibilities and structural constraints and (2) college counseling. The counselor job responsibilities major theme consists of six sub-themes totaling 272 references across all eleven participants. The college counseling major theme consists of five sub-themes referenced 186 times across all eleven participants. Table 6 provides the themes and frequency of reference for all themes.

Table 6: Qualitative Major Themes and Sub-Themes

	Frequency of Reference	Number of Participants
Counselor Job Responsibilities and Structural Constraints Major Theme	**272**	**11**
Administrative Tasks	19	4
Test Coordination	82	11
Scheduling	108	11
Social/Emotional Support	39	11
Case Load	11	11
Best Position for the Job	13	8
College Counseling Major Theme	**186**	**11**
Financial Aid	56	11
College Applications	20	11
High Contact	22	6
Support with College Counseling	70	11
College-Going Beliefs	18	11

Limitations

This study is bound by limitations. First, while the quantitative data set allowed the author access to a vast data set, it also restricted the variable options for the model.

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First, the author had to use some variables as proxies for more specific ideas. For example, rather than assessing the socioeconomic status of students and their families directly, the researcher had to use the highest level of education attained by the parents as a proxy. Additionally, the author would have preferred to use actual college enrollment to determine postsecondary academic match of students, but because of delays at the federal level, access to those data were not yet available. It its place, the author used the less precise variable indicating students' expectations for their own postsecondary educational attainment.

The qualitative component of the study also has limitations. First, the sample size is small and imbalanced. The researcher was unable to find participants from all schools in the College Ambition Program. Rather than limiting participation to one counselor per school, the researcher elected to interview all those counselors who desired to participate, meaning that some schools were represented more than others. Further, analysis could have been strengthened with multiple coders to ensure consistency, but this strategy was not employed given the nature of this study as a dissertation project. In its place, the researcher did employ member checks and follow-up emails and conversations with participants in order to ensure appropriate characterization and summary of participant ideas.

Conclusion

This study uses mixed methods to provide insight into students' college counseling dosage and its influence on the college-going process, with particular attention to expectations for postsecondary academic match, in hopes of using the results to harness the unique position and potential of school counselors to affect student

postsecondary enrollment expectations. Quantitative analysis highlights effects of college

counseling dosage on students' own expectations for a postsecondary academic match.

Qualitative interviews highlight the experiences, beliefs, and challenges school

counselors face in providing significant and informative college counseling programming

to students in high need schools. In conjunction, these data and results provide a unique

view into the job of school counselors and their impact on student expectations of

postsecondary academic match. The following chapter will discuss the results of both the

quantitative and qualitative components of the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results from both the qualitative and quantitative analyses. First, this chapter will describe quantitative results related to the first research question, which aims to explore the relationship between school-based college counseling dosage received by students and the type of postsecondary institution they aspire to attend. Following, the chapter addresses the second research question, which aims to explore the daily responsibilities of school counselors and how those responsibilities may influence their efforts to provide college counseling services to students.

Quantitative Results: Does College Counseling Dosage Influence Students'

Postsecondary Match Expectations?

Quantitative Analysis relates to research question one, which asks: Does college counseling dosage influence students' postsecondary match expectations? A hierarchical linear model was used to assess the impact of a number of factors on the likelihood that respondents would report expectations for postsecondary education attainment. The model contained eight independent variables or variable groups (sex, race, parent education level, parent education expectations for their student, use of a private college counselor, speaking with a high school counselor about college-going, the school's college-going rate, and an estimation of the percent of total time each school's counselors spends on college counseling. This section will begin with a discussion of background and school characteristics on expectations for postsecondary academic match and conclude with a discussion of the variables related most closely to more formalized college counseling dosage. The full results of the undermatch and overmatch models −

ran in comparison to match – are in Table 7, and the measures of variance for the model are included in Appendix E.

Background Characteristics

Among background characteristics, the results suggest that sex, race, parent education, and parent expectation for their students' educational achievement are frequently related to students' expectations for academic match. For example, male students are less likely to hold expectations for an academic undermatch (OR=.63, $p<0.05$), and more likely to hold expectations for an academic overmatch (OR=1.19, $p<0.05$) than their female counterparts.

The relationship between race and expectations for academic match are complex. Hispanic students are more likely to undermatch than their white peers (0.33, $p<0.05$), but there are no apparent differences in undermatch expectations between white students and Black students, or between white students and students of "other" backgrounds. In contrast, both Hispanic and Black students are more likely to overmatch than their white peers, with no differences between white students and students of "other" racial/ethnic backgrounds.

The model also projects some parent characteristics to be significantly related to undermatch and overmatch expectations. Students whose parents expect their children to attain an education level above a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree are less likely to undermatch (OR=.59, $p<0.05$), as are students whose parents expect them to earn a four-year degree or more (OR=.33, $p<0.05$), than their peers whose parents only expect them to attain a high school education or less. Similarly, students whose parents expect them to earn a four-year degree or higher are less likely to overmatch than their

peers whose parents only expect them to earn a high school education or less, though only slightly (OR=.70, p<0.05).

In addition to parent expectations, parent education level is associated with student postsecondary match expectations. Students whose parents attended at least some college (OR=.85, p<0.05) and those who attained a four-year degree or more (OR=.37, p<0.05) are less likely to undermatch than their peers whose parents hold a high school diploma or less. Additionally, students whose parents hold a four-year degree or more are also less likely (OR=.62, p<0.05) to expect to attend a postsecondary overmatch than are students whose parents only hold a high school diploma or less.

College Counseling Dosage Effects

Student use of college counseling services appear to have some significance in projecting likelihood of postsecondary academic match expectations. Students that reported meeting with their high school counselor to discuss college plans are less likely to hold expectations of an academic undermatch than are students who do not meet with their counselor (OR=.74, p<0.05), but no differences are apparent in regards to overmatch expectations. Further, students who reported making use of a privately hired college counselor are less likely to undermatch (OR=.84, p<0.05) and more likely to overmatch (OR=1.27, p<0.05) than their peers who did not use these services.

In contrast, there is a very small but still statistically significant relationship between counselor time spent on college counseling and odds of overmatch. Students in schools in which the school counselor spent between 21% - 49% of their time on college counseling were slightly less lightly to overmatch (OR=.98, p<0.05). However, given the very small relationship and that there was no similar relationship apparent when

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counselors spent even more time on college counseling (50% or greater), this finding should be considered with caution. Together, these findings might suggest that the influence of school counseling behaviors on odds of match are more tightly related to individual level interactions rather than school-level characteristics.

Quantitative Summary

Quantitative findings suggest that a number of factors are related to students' expectations of a postsecondary academic match. Student race, parent education, parent expectations, and the overall college-going rate at a student's school are, to some degree, factors in students matched or mismatched expectations. In addition to the background and context characteristics, college counseling dosage is also related to students' expectations of a postsecondary academic match in a number of ways. Results show a pattern of individual college counseling interactions, such as speaking personally with a school counselor, or use of a privately hired school counselor, to have implications for expectations of a postsecondary academic match. In contrast, efforts not so precisely tied to students at the individual level, such as the overall percentage of hours a school counselor spends on college counseling, is not similarly related. This may point to the highly individual nature of college counselor efforts, implications for which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Table 7: Factors Related to Postsecondary Match expectations

	Overmatch				Undermatch			
Variable	Coefficient	P-Value	Standard Error	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	P-Value	Standard Error	Odds Ratio
Male	0.17	0.01*	0.11	1.19	-0.46	0.00*	0.07	0.63
Talk to HS Counselor	0.05	0.42	0.06	1.05	-0.30	0.00*	0.07	0.74
Private Counselor	0.24	0.02*	0.06	1.27	-0.17	0.12	0.11	0.84
School College Going Rate	-0.02	0.00*	0.00	0.99	-0.01	0.00*	0.00	0.99
Hispanic	0.50	0.00*	0.11	1.65	0.33	0.00*	0.09	1.39
Black	1.02	0.00*	0.10	2.75	0.07	0.51	0.11	0.07
Other	-0.00	0.99	0.10	1.00	-0.12	0.24	0.10	0.89
Parent Ed >HS <4year	0.03	0.65	0.08	1.04	-0.16	0.03*	0.08	0.85
Parent Ed >4yr degree	-0.48	0.00*	0.09	0.62	-1.01	0.00*	0.08	0.37
Counselor 21-49% time on College Counseling	-0.02	0.00*	0.00	.98	0.00	0.94	0.06	1.00
Counselor >50% of time on College Counseling	0.16	0.46	0.21	1.17	0.28	0.122	0.18	1.33
Parents Expect >HS <4year	-0.22	0.17	0.36	0.80	-0.53	0.00*	0.11	0.59
Parents Expect >4yr degree	-0.35	0.01*	0.14	0.70	-1.12	0.00*	0.10	0.33

Results of multinomial logistic regression

Qualitative Results: How do structural constraints and professional beliefs influence school counselors' efforts to provide college counseling?

Qualitative analysis aimed to shed light on counselor job responsibilities, involvement in college counseling, and character of time use. Specifically, it aimed to answer research question two, which states, "How do structural constraints and professional beliefs influence school counselors' efforts to provide college counseling?" The first round of analysis yielded what the researcher identifies as "nodes," or themes established through the first round of coding. Nodes were then grouped and collapsed into themes and sub-themes for clarity. Nodes were aggregated into two main themes of discussion, including counselor job responsibilities and structural constraints, and school-based college counseling efforts. Each broad theme then contains a number of subthemes. The remainder of the chapter will discuss these broader themes and the sub-themes associated with them in detail. All participant quotes provided are unedited.

Job Responsibilities and Structural Constraints That Impede College Counseling

Job responsibilities and structural constraints that impede college counseling is a broad theme that identifies the activities and responsibilities that counselors engage in throughout the school year and the factors that constrain their work as it relates to college counseling. It is necessary to first discuss this theme in order to frame their effort and ability in providing college counseling to students, the key task to be understood for this study. During study interviews, participants were asked questions about a range of duties, including scheduling, test coordination, crisis management, offering social/emotional support services, individualized education plans and 504 plans, discipline, and providing college counseling. Counselors spoke about administrative tasks, scheduling, testing, and

providing social and emotional supports to students at length. In contrast, counselors offered more limited descriptions of discipline, involvement in individualized education plans and 504 plans, and crisis management. In contrast, while all counselors did report some responsibility for and involvement in crisis management, they generally felt that it only required a small amount of their time throughout the year and was significant in infrequent circumstances like faculty or student deaths.

In total, 272 references across all participants constitute this theme. Narrowing, five sub-themes emerged from the major theme, including counselor frustration with the time consuming nature of administrative tasks, frustration with their designation as testing coordinators, the time-consuming nature of student scheduling, feeling overwhelmed by high student to counselor ratios, and the thought that while they felt overwhelmed, it made most sense for counselors, and not other school professionals, to carry out their tasks. Two sub-themes are included out of both importance and high frequency of reference, and three included were referenced less frequently, but stand out as important in the context of the tone, mood, and purpose of the study. Table 8 identifies the frequency of reference for each sub-theme and the number of participants who contributed to each theme.

Table 8: Counselor Job Responsibilities and Structural Constraints Sub-themes

	Frequency of Reference	Number of Participants
Administrative Tasks	19	4
Test Coordination	82	11
Scheduling	108	11
Social/Emotional Support	39	11
Case Load	11	11
Best Position for the Job	13	8
Total	272	11

Administrative Tasks

The interview protocol did not specifically question participants about non-counseling administrative tasks, but they came up independently throughout discussion of other components of school counselor responsibilities. They most often came up with a tone of frustration. These responsibilities included everything from dealing with attendance, to sending student transcripts to postsecondary institutions, and other paper work heavy tasks that participants perceived to be unrelated to the core of the job of a school counselor. Participants often felt that someone else in the school, such as a school secretary, might be a better landing place for some of these responsibilities.

Participants perceived that the weight of these duties is at an imbalance and negatively affects their ability to offer students appropriate personal, academic, and postsecondary counseling. Grace, a veteran counselor in a rural school, putting it succinctly, said, "I feel like I'm an administrator. In fact, I've even – even our principal has mentioned that. He considers us part of the administrative team." Cookie, a rural school counselor, expanded on the notion of administrative work, including clerical work into the definition. She suggested that the over-emphasis on her administrative duties hampered her ability to do the real work of school counselors and restricted her ability to meet with students for personal, academic, and postsecondary guidance. She said:

> The core of counseling, to me, is actually speaking in person with students. I feel like a lot of the administrative duties, like sending transcripts, those kind of things that in other buildings maybe a secretary or registrar takes care of, those are the types of things that end up eating up a lot of time where I could be seeing more kids.

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Another counselor put this in perspective, noting that having school counselors perform some heavily administrative tasks was an expensive use of time for the district, and that it would make more organizational, professional, and economic sense to divert some of those duties to clerical personnel. She emphasized that her district has been piecing apart the counseling part of counselor job responsibilities, such as social/emotional counseling, and replacing them with tasks that are predominantly clerical. Stephanie, a rural school counselor, said:

> That is the number one topic of discussion in all of our steering committee
> meetings. Why are we doing all this clerical work? Because nothing in our
> graduate programs trained us for this. I think the trend, at least in [school district],
> and I don't know in a lot of other districts how they're handling this, is they're
> bringing in mental health specialists from other fields, a lot of social workers,
> behavior intervention specialists, who – that's usually just a bachelor's degree –
> and they're paying them an hourly rate to do mental health and behavioral issues,
> and they're bringing in someone else to do college counseling. So, you know, I
> think the perception among central administration in lots of places is that
> guidance counselors are not trained in mental health issues – and they absolutely
> are – when we're in our graduate program. The old school guidance only
> approach, not so much. You know, theirs was more of a guidance model. What I
> would recommend is that these clerical positions, testing – coordinator, schedulers
> – could all be done by a bachelor's level person. They're clerical.

Stephanie's frustration was evident and highlights a common theme among participants – that the increasing reliance on school counselors to do clerical and administrative tasks

has removed much of the counseling from the job of a school counselor. Her feelings

were mirrored by Rhoda, a counselor in a strained urban school, who lamented the

increasingly clerical nature of her job responsibilities. Rhoda felt that counselors are

given clerical and administrative tasks by school administrators because administrators

lack appropriate knowledge of what school counselors can and should be doing. She

succinctly said, "The most stressful part of my job day-to-day is knowing that my

superiors have no absolute clue what I should be doing as a school counselor." When

pressed to describe responsibilities unrelated to the job of a school counselor, Rhoda

explained:

> Ryan: Are there any duties or obligations that you deal with, that you do every
>
> day, that you think distract you or take away from the core of the work as a school
>
> counselor?
>
> Rhoda: Absolutely. I mean, at times, I feel like I'm a glorified secretary because
>
> of the lack of knowledge of what we're supposed to do by the powers that be in
>
> this district who write the job descriptions, or the evaluative procedures, where
>
> they're still utilizing a teaching professional tool on me rather than a student
>
> guidance counselor evaluative tool. And you know, there's a big argument about
>
> that right now because it's just, it's not appropriate. And I can speak 'til I'm blue
>
> in the face, but it hasn't changed. I wish that these other passionate adults that are
>
> in the building really could get a larger picture of what those of us who are not in
>
> the classroom do because there's still this misnomer that, you know, the reason a
>
> person goes from a teacher to become a school counselor is so they can drink
>
> coffee and just talk all day, and eat bonbons, and put parties together. And that is

such a misconception. Maybe my guidance counselor was like that back in the '80s, but that is not the case anymore. We have a very valuable role, and I think that we are very much misused and misunderstood and undervalued. And I would love to see the powers that be listen and utilize us appropriately because I think what would happen is they would see a trend change with behavioral issues, maybe suspension rates, achievement rates, etc.

Rhoda's excerpt underscores both her lack of feeling valued and the lack of clarity surrounding the job of school counselors – and what that means for the responsibilities they are delegated. Rhoda's point that school counselors are evaluated using a teacher evaluation metric identifies the lack of concern, care, and understanding she feels that those in administrative positions have for the position and responsibilities of the school counselor. Rhoda feels that an accurate understanding of counselor abilities, and a better utilization of their services, would eliminate some administrative and clerical tasks from their duties and result in improved school conditions due to the increased focus on student-centered counseling tasks. Her frustration level mirrored the general tenor of the participants around the issue of non-counseling administrative and clerical tasks. They see these responsibilities as detracting from their jobs, from their value, from their ability to positively contribute, and from their ability to adequately perform more important counseling duties like college and personal counseling.

Testing

School counselors' reactions to coordinating testing procedures was unanimous and visceral. Participants repeatedly spoke with frustration about the amount of time that testing coordination takes away from counseling duties and postsecondary planning.

School counselors seemed baffled that this responsibility, in particular, landed on their plate, seeing no benefit from it or importance to counseling. Rather, they felt like test coordination was dumped in their laps as they are often the only non-teaching staff in the building except for administrators. In particular, counselors appeared frustrated not just by being testing coordinators, but specifically with coordinating the state testing process, which they saw as more time consuming and more professionally unrelated than other testing processes, like work and career inventories. Grace, a rural school counselor, identified test coordination as something that distracted her from the core work of counselors and is something she thinks should be under the purview of another staff member. We discussed:

> Ryan: And are there any of those duties specifically that, not just that you would prefer not to do, but that you feel distract you from the core work of what a school counselor needs to be doing?
>
> Grace: Testing. Yeah, I don't know, and I think it's true in most of the schools that somehow counselors have become the standardized test gurus. They handle it all. There are some exceptions where some, the administration does it. But, I mean, that's huge. And it's on our plate, and I don't know that it really should be, other than maybe needing the kid's ACT score because we're helping them with college, but we're administering all of it, doing all of it.

Elliot, an urban school counselor who sometimes questions his choice of profession, further underscored the influence test coordination has on counselor job duties, emphasizing that because it is state-mandated, it has to take priority over other counselor responsibilities. When asked how he prioritized tasks, Elliot said:

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Yeah, I mean, what the state says or my district says needs to be done is top

priority. I mean, unless we're talking life or death, right? So that takes top

priority. And then any time there's a test on the table that needs to be done and all

that good stuff, then I have to, I have to get the testing done. So testing in the

state's eyes and district's eyes feels and looks like that's all that should be our top

priority, no matter what people are saying.

The absolute prioritization of testing by counselors' school administrators was unanimous among participants. Participants felt that they either had to tend to testing duties first or that they were preoccupied with them when engaging in other tasks like crisis management. Like Elliot and Grace, when asked if any responsibilities distract from the core of the job of a school counselor, Raquel, a veteran school counselor new to high school counseling, singled out testing, and state mandated testing in particular. She said:

Really, I have to, I blame it on state testing, not just testing like the ACT, or SAT

or whatever, you know, the PSAT, you know, I can sort of say no, those are more

relevant to what we do because they are different tests that help with the next step.

State testing? As a big umbrella, it doesn't help with the next step at all.

Test coordination responsibilities held a special place of disdain among the participants in this study. When asked about hoped-for job changes, counselors most often cited testing as something that can and should be removed from the list of duties counselors are responsible for. The researcher ran a query of each node representing a counselor responsibility and cross-referenced it with a note representing desired job changes; these two nodes were linked 97 times throughout the interviews and for all 11 participants, meaning that when participants spoke about one, they also spoke about the

other. While a diverse set of responsibilities was wished away by the participants, the unanimity and frequency of the testing reference was unique.

Scheduling

Counselors' opinions on scheduling were more mixed than their very negative view of test coordination responsibility. Participants saw important connections between the scheduling process and the job of school counselors, but they were also often frustrated by the time consuming, low-tech approach most districts and counseling departments employ to carry out the process. While every participant reported using some computer-based system in the counseling process, they did not see the software as sufficient enough to be used without lots of human oversight, sometimes electing to hand-enter and hand-check all student schedules because of what they saw as software flaws. Further, none of the participants had previously successful experiences allowing students to enter their own schedules, so they instead reverted to approaches that required significant intervention and oversight from the counseling staff.

Della, an outspoken rural school counselor, saw the scheduling process as an opportunity to meet with students individually, discuss their long term educational goals, and to begin to earn their trust. When asked how she would feel if another staff member took over the scheduling duties, Della responded that she would like to give up parts, but not all of scheduling:

> But that, I would say some of the scheduling, but I also, but I like the scheduling piece because that's your opportunity to usually talk to a student and maybe talk to them about, "Hey, have you thought about this class or what is it you want to do?" So, sometimes it's a way to get them in the door and get them to open up

and maybe discuss other things or find out more about them. And getting them

comfortable that, hey, you can come down here whenever you need. You know,

I'm not this person behind the desk that's gonna tell you to go away or…

Lucas, a pensive urban school counselor, saw the scheduling process similarly to Della –
as potentially valuable for academic advising. When asked how he would feel if the
school were to reassign his scheduling responsibilities to another person, he argued that
the scheduling process provided counselors an opportunity to verify and discuss students'
progress. He was not supportive of a more automated, less personal scheduling process in
which those conversations do not happen. Lucas responded:

This goes back to that feeling that we have, we already have, the administrative

assistants could literally do the scheduling with the students, but we as a guidance

department have chosen to not do that because we do feel like in order to do our

job, and to do it well and correctly, someone has to be checking on what the

students are doing to make sure they're doing what they need to be doing, as in

are they meeting the graduation requirements. Are they repeating classes that they

failed because they need those classes to graduate? Has there been a conversation

about, you know, should I be taking advanced biology, or should I be taking

physics or whatever? And so from that standpoint, could someone else be trained

to do that? Yeah, uh huh. Someone else can be trained to do that. And as long as

that's the way they're doing it, I'm fine with it. But if they're literally just

plugging in classes, then no, I'm not fine with it. Then I'm not fine with it.

Cookie felt like the others, acknowledging the potential for conversation with students as
important. She saw scheduling as an opportunity to help students think about their long-

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term plans. She was open to reassigning some of the more clerical parts of scheduling to another staff member, but not abdicating the counselor role in it completely. She said:

> I wouldn't want to give it all up. I think, like I said, there are some things that I think getting the student in and talking to them and getting them thinking about down the road, what classes you want to take, where are you thinking you want to go to college. You know, making sure they're in the right classes. You failed this class, you're going to need to make this up, there are some opportunities there to open the door and make sure they're on track and build rapport, I guess, so that they're comfortable. But I don't think I'd want to give away the whole thing.

Lastly, taking a different view of the importance of scheduling, Raquel was hesitant to the idea that her urban district might reassign scheduling duties to someone else because it is such a big part of her job. Additionally, like the others, she felt that the academic advising component of the scheduling process was a particularly valuable piece for counselors to own, and one that should continue even if the more clerical components were reassigned. She responded:

> Well, it depends on, you know, your definition of scheduling. Here, in [school district], my involvement with scheduling is pretty much, it helps me keep my job. However, what I find more valuable is when I'm working with the kids and filling out the appropriate documentation, and then if someone else wanted to enter it, that would be great. But I still think that the academic guidance is imperative to help students reach their goals, and that has to come from a school counselor because of our wealth of knowledge of each of the subjects. But again, you know, I don't need to be a glorified clerical person to just enter it.

Social and Emotional Support Services

Counselors in the study also provide social and emotional support to students. All eleven counselors referenced this sub-theme; ten indicated that they spent a significant portion of their time providing social and emotional support to students, and one lamented the lack of time she is able to spend on this area. Social and emotional support services can include individual appointments with students to discuss breakups, friendship problems, family issues, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, illnesses within the family, and running small group counseling efforts, like grief groups and support groups for girls. Cookie described some of her work in this area:

> Okay. So I do groups and they kind of fluctuate on what the need is. Like, I will throw out categories of, like, here's the groups I'm running and kind of see. So I'm about to start some in the next week or two and it kind of just became, like, a really generic-y, like what's going on that's not allowing you to be successful in school. Because we have, like, people with PTSD, people with anxiety, and we have people who just have, like, family stuff going on, like illness or just, like, conflict with parents. So it's just, like, 'cause it's 'cause we're small (the school), so I feel like it's hard to, like, do that. So, I do groups, just kind of, we usually set them up for six weeks and then at the end of the six weeks, we kind of see, do we need to carry on or not carry on? I do usually go into health class and talk about healthy relationships, and dating relationships, and things like that, and what's the signs of, like, you know, domestic violence types of things, and things like that.

While Cookie first described more formal and group efforts at providing social and emotional support services, Elliot discussed the individual nature of emotional counseling in his urban school. Elliot said:

> Yeah, we have an open door policy in our building. You don't have to make appointments in our building. We're just here for whatever they need. So the personal/social, whether it's bullying, or parents are getting a divorce, or whatever. We're here just to listen and I like to just process with the student depending on what the issue is. I do as much as I can before I call their parents, just to build that trust. They kind of know that if they're gonna do something illegal, hurt themselves or hurt somebody else, that I've gotta call mom. Depending on the issue, I'll give them 24 hours to go and talk to their parents and have their mom and dad call me, and if I don't hear back, I'll call them. But I'm just here to listen and provide some solutions, but I like to lead kids down a path where they're coming up with their own solutions. But our role is, you know, just to be ready to take whatever kids have.

Elliot saw his position as an ear and gentle guide to help students find their own way to the right path. His acknowledgement of an open-door policy was common among participants, and they noted that students frequently took advantage of those services. Counselors acknowledged that providing social and emotional supports to students are a daily responsibility taking up a significant amount of their time. One counselor, Lucas, estimated that 5-7 students per day walk into his office for social and emotional support. Grace spoke of similar levels of involvement on this issue and noted that one major challenge is that these sorts of issues are unpredictable, unlike some other counselor

tasks, like test coordination or scheduling efforts that can generally be planned for. She

gave the example of the day before the interview, saying:

> I find I can come in the morning with an idea in my head. I need to do A, B and
>
> C, finish the list, do the testing. But yesterday would've been a perfect example. I
>
> did neither because I became totally responsive. I must've had four or five
>
> emotional crises yesterday that's kept me in the office, doing what I needed to be
>
> doing. That's the priority, but that's what I mean. There is no typical day. Maybe
>
> that's sometimes why you kind of enjoy your job because you don't have a
>
> routine. You have no idea what the routine will be.

Overall, counselors identified this sub-theme as something that significantly impacts their

ability to meet all responsibilities; however, they also found this kind of work as core to

the job of a school counselor, and something that they would like to do more of in place

of other tasks described above. Della said:

> Counseling has become a small fraction of what we do…you want to work on
>
> bullying issues, you want to work on social issues, grief groups. There's all these
>
> things that when we were in our program were out there that you need to do all
>
> these things, and the reality is that we're scheduling and testing – you know, we
>
> could go through the whole list.

Case Load

In addition to specific tasks that impeded participants' ability to be the counselors

they wanted to be, they all also complained about their caseloads, which ranged from

between 250:1 to over 600:1. Seven counselors from three districts reported a caseload

near the range supported by the American School Counselor Association, but they still

felt constrained by it. The remainder had large case loads and felt constrained by those numbers. In this sample, rural counselors were very likely to have smaller caseloads, and urban school counselors had much higher case loads.

Rhoda reported a case load of nearly 425 students in her high-need urban school. Due to the confluence of a large caseload and a particularly large number of students at-risk of not graduating at her school, she felt that she was limited in her ability to provide adequate college and career guidance to students. When asked about the most stressful part of her job, Rhoda said it was the time constraints placed on her due to her large caseload. She lamented:

Ryan: What would you say is the most stressful part of your job here?

Rhoda: In terms of tasks or just…

Ryan: Any way you think about stress.

Rhoda: Time constraint. There's just, I have almost 425 kids on my caseload right now, and there are just not enough hours in the day to do everything I need to do, and especially, I think, the concern when you've got seniors who are either college bound or just trying to graduate and in an urban school, we have so many off track students that I feel this constant responsibility to get them graduated. And you spend so much time on that, that there isn't the time to do, like I said, any guidance counseling, college career counseling. It's all about just staying afloat and keeping them in school and getting them graduated.

Raquel, a counselor at the same urban school, also felt bogged down by her caseload, feeling like she is always clockwatching when meeting with students because she does

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not feel like she has enough time to fit everything in, including dealing with transcripts as part of the college application process.

The American School Counseling Association recommends 250:1 and I'm at 425. So, you know, it's getting up there. There are places, I heard recently that in (nearby city), they have, like, 900:1 ratio. Like, it's insane. I think there's a reason that they recommend that 250, it's so you have time to be in the classroom and deal with things. It's…I can't tell you how often I'll have a kid in crisis that I'm just, I'm looking at the clock going, yeah, my next appointment is waiting or I've got this, you know, transcript has to be done before the end of the day. You can never, everything's so time sensitive that you can't just handle what needs to be handled.

Pattie, a counselor and frequent leading voice at a rural high school, had a slightly different view. Even though her student-to-counselor ratio had declined during her tenure due to declining school enrollment, she still felt unable to meet the needs of her comparatively small caseload because, while she recognized her ratio was preferable to others, her non-counseling duties have increased over time. She said, "So even though my ratio is smaller, I actually feel busier than I did when it was bigger. And I still feel like I can't meet the needs of 275 kids." Pattie's larger point was that the student-to-counselor ratio can be deceiving because, while guidelines have not changed, the tasks of school counselors have expanded significantly, giving them much less time for individual student counseling that may have been the case in the past, all other factors held constant. Overall, participants in rural schools saw much lower case loads than those in urban

schools, but participants in both regions still feel unable to meet the needs of their students.

Best Person For the Job

Even though counselors lamented the amount of non-counseling and administrative responsibilities they were assigned, they also acknowledged that, of school staff, they might make the most sense as the person responsible for those duties. In total, eight participants referenced this idea a total of 13 times. Raquel made the point that there was nobody in the building to pass some responsibilities to. She noted that as her resource-short district has accepted help from external organizations and hired lower-skilled employees on an hourly basis, many of the non-counseling tasks she does helps her keep her job. About these non-counseling tasks, she noted, "I think there, there really isn't anyone that we could pass it off to if we wanted to. Doesn't mean that they couldn't shift some of their hiring to focus in different areas." Raquel felt somewhat slighted that her district was accepting help and hiring external employees to do tasks she sees as central to the job that a counselor should have. However, in absence of changing those practices and reallocating responsibilities, she felt it made most sense for counselors to be responsible for many of the non-counseling duties that are left.

Another rural school participant, Mandy, reflected differently that, even though not all counselor duties are necessarily counseling in nature, they are all part of treating the student as a whole through the counseling process. We discussed her thoughts:

Ryan: Are there any duties or obligations that you shoulder that you feel distract you or take away from the core work of being a school counselor?

Mandy: I don't think so. I mean, there's…I could say I don't have to do

scheduling, or I don't have to do testing, you know, but really, all of those parts

come together for that student. And you know, I've learned a lot of things about

students that have helped me be able to help them better in making decisions as

far as their career or college goes based on what I know about them from being

involved in the other parts. All the parts that make the whole student.

Another participant, Pattie, argued similarly, using scheduling as an example. She

thought that while someone else, or some automated software, could complete the

scheduling process, the counselor has a unique ability to review those schedules based on

their previous conversations with and knowledge about students, conversations that could

relate to important academic, career, or postsecondary plans related to course choices.

Pattie went on to say:

That's why it (administrative tasks and non-counseling duties) so far has stayed

all under our umbrella even though somebody else could know graduation

requirements. But that somebody else might not have had conversations with the

student about their plans for the future and be like, you know what? You totally

didn't put forensic science in your schedule and you think you want to go into

criminology somehow. You should have forensic science, right? So you know, if

they put in a different class and I'm, and I don't know that student, then you

would never say, you never have that opportunity to… so it's hard to take them

out of context.

In summary, while counselors complained about non-counseling and

administrative tasks, there was also some disagreement about whether or not, or to what

extent, school counselors need be a part of some duties. While the time consuming nature of scheduling was frustrating to counselors, they generally felt it was important for the school counselor to be involved in the process. In regards to testing, while no counselor saw any value in coordinating the state testing process, several saw other testing components, such as career inventories and tests like the ACT, as an important part of the postsecondary counseling process. For these reasons, even though these responsibilities were at times frustrating to counselors, they also saw the merit of school counselors having responsibility for them.

College Counseling

The second major theme to emerge from the data revolved around college counseling. Participants discussed college counseling responsibilities often, referencing the topic 186 times across all participants. The theme consists of five sub-themes, including providing financial aid support, guiding students through the application process, the high-contact nature of school counseling, offering college counseling services, and discussion about their beliefs about college-going. Table 9 presents the frequencies for college counseling sub-themes.

Table 9: College Counseling Sub-themes

	Frequency of Reference	Number of Participants
Financial Aid	56	11
College Applications	20	11
High Contact	22	6
Support with College Counseling	70	11
College-Going Beliefs	18	11
Total	186	11

Financial Aid

Participants reported two main avenues to promote and assist students with financial aid and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), including holding financial aid/FAFSA nights for parents and students and offering individual support to parents and students as they complete the online FAFSA application. All schools reported bringing somebody in, typically a representative from a local community college, to give a presentation to students and families on financial aid nights. Cookie described some of her financial aid efforts:

> So we have a college admission or financial aid person from various colleges come every year and do a presentation for parents. And then we offer, like, I educate the families on college Goal Sunday. And then this year, there was, like, a Saturday thing at the ISD (intermediate school district) that they helped. I always, like, I had a mom yesterday, and so I just even told her how to call the FAFSA help…So, we, this year we're participating in the FAFSA completion challenge, which it's hard 'cause I feel like you tell the kids to send it in by March 1st and then the state won't tell you until the middle of March, or the federal government, or whoever it is that gives us this list. Like, we can't even get it until three weeks after the March 1st deadline…I've had like seven kids tell me that they've done their FAFSA. You know what I mean? So, like, and it's to then meet with each of the kids, and I've had a few kids who were like, I don't even, I haven't started it. I'm, like, that's fine. Like, come meet with me. We'll get it started. We'll do things. And we'll apply for a PIN and then you can take the sheet home and work with your parents.

Her efforts were typical of the participants, with every participant reporting that their school held financial aid nights and supported students individually. Another counselor, Della, discussed financial aid issues specific to the at-risk students in her school, namely issues with parent knowledge. She said, "…a lot of my kids, because they're first generation college, tend, they, the kid I was late for, has mom done this? No. So okay. It's after March 1st but okay, we'll get through this." Similarly, she later described dealing individually with, and reaching out to tax specialists for support to help students complete the FAFSA whose parents had not filed their taxes in recent years. Participants repeatedly described the financial aid process as complex and labor intensive, but they were also committed to assisting all students and families who needed help.

College Applications

In addition to financial aid activities, counselors reported assisting students with college applications. In some schools, the counselors reported keeping a list of students who have and have not yet applied to schools, and following up with those students who have not applied. Pattie, for example, said that, "We keep a list of all the seniors and where they applied. We always have to follow up with stragglers and try to convince them to at least submit an application to [Community College]. In addition to convincing students to apply to school, having individual conversations with students about which schools to apply to, and reviewing completed applications in rare cases, counselors most frequently reported a group counseling approach to improving college application completion at their schools. Elliot discussed these efforts, including his work in helping to share information about the application process and affect the college-going culture at his school. He said:

…Going into classrooms and sharing information about various topics, whether

it's, okay, it's time to finish your applications. We have been doing college

application week for two years so bringing in volunteers to assist with that

process. We have partnerships with various schools who are willing to do onsite

admissions, meaning the seniors find out right then and there that they've been

accepted or not. We have a strong partnership with [Community College]

recruiters, helping kids apply, claim their accounts…

The group counseling approach was less geared towards the individual and more geared

towards the high-need schools that these counselors worked in. They viewed an

important part of their role as improving the college-going culture of a school, and the

application process provided a clear avenue to do that.

High Touch Nature of College Counseling

While counselors spoke frequently of group counseling and school-wide college-

going culture in relation to the college application process, they also acknowledge the

importance of high-contact college counseling. In total, 6 participants spoke about

college counseling being high-touch or high contact in nature a total of 22 times. While

they also spoke about providing financial aid support and supporting students through the

application process, the acknowledgement of the high-contact nature of college

counseling was a theme that ran throughout the various components of college counseling

and was particularly salient given the research questions of this study.

Della, when discussing assisting her rural students with college applications,

noted that it took more than encouragement and sending students off to complete them

individually. Experience has taught her that unless she is able to be with students as they

fill out and submit applications, they frequently go undone. Della said, "…and the frustration is even that year when I did call them in, it would still be, you'd still have to truly sit there and watch them submit it or keep checking it, and it's no." In addition, Mandy spoke about the intersection of individual college counseling and efforts at the school or the group level. While Mandy lists the intensely individual nature of the process, from discussing specific postsecondary options and the paperwork associated with the application process, she also coordinates efforts to influence the college-going culture at the school-level through announcements and locker displays. Describing her involvement in the college-going process, Mandy outlines some of her efforts:

> Mandy: We, well, when I meet with them, each of them for their senior meeting, their senior appointment, I make sure they have applied somewhere, and if not, where they're going to apply. And we get the list from Docufide where they've had their transcripts sent so we can send that and make sure, and then we're just constantly reminding, sending out announcements, tracking kids down. You said you were going to apply here and you didn't apply. Giving them a little extra encouragement and push to get a lot of that done. This year we did two, you know, college application weeks where you can apply free to several colleges during that week. We really hit that pretty hard and we did, we do locker signs for students, you know, once they've applied, putting them on their locker. And that seems to really help to get kids to apply more places. They want a sign on their locker. Everybody else already applied so they're starting to feel the pressure that they want to do it, too. So, I think this year, the locker signs, that helped a lot.

Even for those counselors with smaller case loads, the high-contact nature of college counseling is immensely time consuming. Mandy, not the only counselor to conduct individual appointments with every senior student, sees roughly 125 student appointments with seniors, in addition to the rest of her non-senior case load, all at least one time, and some more than once, depending on their needs related to the college-going process. While counselors were very aware of the need for college counseling to be high contact and highly individual, they felt constrained by the time consuming nature of it in relation to their other responsibilities.

Support with College Counseling

College counseling was the responsibility school counselors were most likely to report receiving assistance with and working with other professionals in the building, ranging from teachers and administrators to support staff from external programs. Overall, counselors welcomed the support from others and were happy that students had access to additional resources given the labor-intensive nature of providing college counseling. An appreciative Cookie described two such programs in her building:

I feel like the CAP program at [institution] has been really helpful in just, besides just putting someone there, like honestly, like the financial support has been really helpful. You know what I mean? We can't, we can't afford to do a field trip every month to a different college. And to charge our kids, which we used to do, like, kids don't always have the money and families don't have the money to pay to go to visit a college. You know what I mean? So I think taking down any barriers and just getting them college access, that's been good. And I really feel like the [external program], that whole system has really, I don't know if it's the people

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who are in charge have just really gone with it, or if it's just that it's a brand new

program. In having the trainings and having the resources and having, like, you

know, having college application week and having FAFSA completion initiatives

and having Decision Day and, like, all of these things that, that are very, like,

here's how to do it, and here's what to do is very helpful. Because when you're

busy, like yeah, that's a great idea, and it's a really simple idea, and I can do that.

You know what I mean? That you can tell me what to do and I can do it and that's

great.

Cookie's reflections mirror those of most other counselors. Participants frequently and

specifically acknowledged the benefit of having external programs provide ways for

students to take college visits and indicated that their schools, due to school resources and

counselor time limitations, could not provide that same experience. Additionally, her

reflections on the advice and direction received from another external program indicates

an appreciation for additional ideas and clarification about the process, but it could also

indicate a weakness in knowledge or skill with regards to college counseling.

Whereas Cookie reflected about the benefit of partnerships on her ability to

provide improved college counseling, and the ability of her school to enhance the

resources directed at it, Raquel indicated appreciation for the external organization

providing college counseling services at her school because the counseling staff is unable

to provide the same services due to structural constraints. When asked to describe her

involvement in college counseling at her school, Raquel said:

I get to print a CT and transcript request for students, so I at least get, you know,

some idea of where they're applying because I, and thank goodness we have our

CAP program, because if we didn't have college advisors in the building, I honestly don't know what we'd do. They are so good, and they are focused strictly on college visits, college presentations, helping kids with FAFSA, helping them apply. I mean, if we, there's no way that we could sit and walk kids through the application process like they do. We have a computer down here to work with but we just, there would be no time. So, it's not, it's not what I wish it was. They're awesome. They will include us in anything that we ask. They're very good about communicating with us. I've gone on one college visit this year, but any time that we want to involve ourselves, they're, they're really open to that. But other than that, I mean, really, that is the extent of what we're doing unless we just happen to be talking to kids when they come down for scheduling about what their future plans are.

She was clear to acknowledge the openness of the program and its communication with the counseling staff. However, she was also clear on the inability of the staff to do what a more focused college counseling service can offer. Whether able to participate like Cookie, or unable to like Raquel, the counselors universally appreciated these help providing services because of their view that college counseling is labor-intensive and individual in nature.

Beliefs About College-Going

Participants were quite clear about their college-going beliefs. Participants were confronted with the common notion that "college is for everyone" and asked to provide their own thoughts on who should or should not go to college. Just two counselors

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insisted that all students, regardless of future occupation, would benefit from some type of postsecondary credential, be it a certificate, two-year, or four-year degree. The remaining school counselors were deferential to student desires regarding postsecondary experiences, often stating that they begin college counseling sessions by asking students what they want.

Stephanie, a veteran rural school counselor, spoke about the need to know the student and what success is on an individual level. She was hesitant to impose a postsecondary belief system on her students and instead preferred deference to family traditions and beliefs. Stephanie reflected on the question of who should go to college:

Hm. Well, I think, I mean, I think it really depends on, you know, what the individual student decides is success for them. That's kind of a hard question to answer. You know, I mean, I obviously understand the importance of college and the opportunity that it brings to students, but I'm also well aware that some students, that's not their definition of success, and other jobs that might not require college are. So it's hard to say if there's, like, a specific student that should or shouldn't go to college. I think it's really individually based. And obviously has a lot to do with, you know, what their, what their family's traditions and things are as well. You know, if you grew up on a farm and that's what you're gonna do, then that, then that is your definition of success and happiness, so can that student go to, go to college? Absolutely. But at the same time, if that's not what their, you know, passion and career path is then that's appropriate as well.

Della more directly responded that, no, college is not for everyone.

I think it's not for everyone. I think it needs to be, you know, an option that they know is out there, but I don't think they should necessarily be forced into doing it. I think really talking about what do you enjoy? What do you want to do after high school? And if some of them say I have this job lined up and that's what I want to do, I don't think there's anything wrong with that. But I like that they're at least aware of, you know, this is the process you do if you do want to go to [Community College] and you change your mind, or if you want to transfer. And a lot of times, I'll hear, well, I'm gonna go to [Community College] 'cause it's cheaper, or I'm gonna go to…and there, I do kind of, you know, we try to talk about…don't necessarily close the door on going to a four year school. Still apply, 'cause see, maybe you'll get scholarships or you'll get financial aid and things that will bring the cost down, which will end up being more cost efficient in the end than transferring.

Grace agreed with Della, highlighting the benefits of pursuing a trade, worrying that some students are forced into college because it is the more accepted path when there are other options that are more appropriate for some students.

I don't know that all kids are for college. We have a career center that has wonderful programs and, unfortunately, it's limited to how many kids it can take per district 'cause it's a county-wide program. So, there are often kids who would benefit in being up there, but because of room, they can't, or because of other reasons, they can't. But they're, these kids are graduating from high school with skills in welding and auto tech and things like that, histo, medical fields, and so forth, that they don't need, it's a skilled trade and they make more money than we

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do in some of these programs, like welding. So, access to those kids because I'm afraid that a lot of kids, even here, are being forced into a college education when that would've been more appropriate.

Counselors also spoke highly of the decision of students to begin at a two-year institution and later transfer to a four-year institution for cost savings, or to bide them time to figure out what they might actually want to do in college and in life. However, they did not express knowledge of the challenges of the transfer process or how that might be detrimental to a student's long-term education and career goals. Cookie, for example, said:

A lot of kids are, like, I'm just gonna go to [Community College] for two years, get my basics out of the way, and then I'm gonna go to this college. And some of them know exactly where they want to go, and some are, like, I have no idea what I want to do. And, I'm, like, then it makes sense to go to [Community College] because I would decide, and I changed, and it's hard because you don't know what you're gonna do anyway. But like the program I wanted, [Four-Year School] didn't offer when I went to undergrad. So, like, I ended up, I didn't want to leave [Four-Year School] 'cause I was a sophomore and, like, I was comfortable there, and I had my friends and I liked it. So, it's, like, had I been younger and I, like, learned about a career, then I could've better picked a college.

While Cookie's acceptance of the transfer option was related to her own personal experience, most other participants still agreed, asserting that community college was a good way for students to save money or to experience lower-cost classes while they

explored and solidified their future educational and career plans, seeing it as a waste to do so at a four-year institution.

Overall, participants were very deferential to trades, community colleges, and wary of over-emphasizing four, and in some cases, even full two-year programs. This deference could be problematic in that counselors seemed wary to push full information to students and instead gave them information specifically requested. As such, if a student expresses a desire to attend a two-year college, participants in this study seemed unlikely to provide them with in-depth comparisons of two-year and four-year institutions, such as laying out differences in resources, support, graduation rates, challenges transferring from one institution to another, and long-term impact on life.

Qualitative Summary

Results from both the qualitative and quantitative components of the study provide an intriguing lens through which to think about postsecondary academic match expectations and college counseling services offered in schools. Qualitative exploration showed that counselors in this sample feel stymied in their efforts to provide these services. This is telling since all participants work in schools with lower than average college-going rates. The next chapter will provide a discussion of these results and the study wholly, including implications and recommendations for policy and practice.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research study was to explore the intersection of college counseling and students' own expectations for a postsecondary academic match, with specific attention to at-risk students and the schools that serve them. This chapter will discuss a summary of the findings, provide an explanation of the study's limitations, and overview implications for policy and practice.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

It is important to view the results of the study through the theoretical lens that this study rests on. To revisit, this study was framed around Coleman's (1998) social capital theory, with the assertion that school and college counselors have the opportunity to provide students with social capital that they may not necessarily receive through home, family, and peer contacts by establishing trusting relationships that affect the norms, values, expectations, and information channels surrounding the college-going process. As a result, policies and practices aimed at improving college-going and postsecondary academic match expectations should consider the implication that college counseling, and in particular, school-based college counseling, has on the types of postsecondary institutions that students should expect to attend given their academic ability.

Quantitative analysis showed that college counseling at the individual level does appear to affect students' expectations for a postsecondary academic match. However, the relationship between college counseling efforts broadly, as reported by the school counselor in terms of an estimate of their time spent on the task, which likely includes large group counseling efforts and individual counseling, do not appear to affect students'

expectations for a postsecondary academic match. This is not what the researcher predicted, but it may significantly add to the literature in this area.

While much of the literature on college going in the high school environment focuses on creating a college-going culture, relying on the results of this study, the author questions that focus as it relates specifically to postsecondary academic match. While this study offers no counter-evidence to the idea that emphasizing a college-going culture at the school-level will improve college-going rates, it also does not substantiate that focus when the outcome emphasizes academic match rather than college-going to any postsecondary institution. It does lead the researcher to question whether those broad-based efforts – those things not specifically targeted at developing individual college counseling relationships – are able to affect the type of institution students expect to attend and eventually enroll in. The researcher instead asserts that social capital developed through high-contact, individualized college counseling relationships are most important to influencing students' expectations for their own postsecondary educational attainment in the context of academic match, rather than the more nebulous college-going culture, an assertion bolstered by the theoretical framework. This is particularly important as it underscores the importance of high-touch, one-on-one college counseling, the type of counseling difficult to offer when counselors are hampered by large caseloads and structural constraints like scheduling and test administration responsibilities.

Quantitative results were complementary to qualitative data which showed that school counselors are hamstrung by non-counseling and administrative duties, limiting the amount of time that they are able to spend on college counseling. As the participants described, limited time then results in a lack of college counseling services at the

individual level and an over-reliance on less precise guidance methods, such as sharing information widely, through announcements, displays, and, when possible, large group presentations. While the researcher sees a place for these components, their effectiveness, independent of high-contact college counseling services at the individual level, should be reconsidered as they may be insufficient for addressing issues related to postsecondary academic match expectations.

In addition to quantitative and qualitative data specifically, this study addresses an important hole in both the literature and the current scholarly conversation on postsecondary academic match. As discussed in the review of the literature, much of the recent research on postsecondary academic match focuses on low-income, high achievers and supporting their enrollment in elite institutions. While low-income, high achieving students should be provided the opportunity and support that their peers receive, focusing on this very narrow group of students seems like a missed opportunity for the research community and policymakers. While the researcher acknowledges the appeal of that research, we should be moved by a strong moral, social, and academic obligation to also focus efforts on questions that can extend opportunity to the broadest range of students and not just to those students considered academically elite.

Further, the researcher noted the tendency of school counselors to be deferential to student desires throughout the college counseling process. While taking students' own desires into consideration is exceptionally important, the researcher would also like to push school counselors to take a more assertive stance on students' future plans. School counselors may better serve students by more aggressively providing them with information about the benefits of a four-year degree over a two-year degree or no degree

at all. Without a more forward leaning approach, students may not seriously consider the options that the researcher argues are best for the majority of students. The researcher is concerned that school counselors have become perhaps too resistant to encourage students to the most successful path in favor of a more laissez-faire approach to guidance that leans more on the college counseling process than the college counseling outcome.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The limitations of this study mainly pertain to the quantitative and qualitative samples. The quantitative sample only provided data on student postsecondary expectations. Of course, expectation does not necessarily equate to action or enrollment, so this study should be extended in the future once matriculation data is available to explore those differences. Additionally, because a study of this nature must rely on a very large data set, each variable selected was based on availability, meaning that some variables were identified as proxies for more accurate but unavailable data. An improved study would use a more precise indicator of students' socioeconomic status and an academic assessment inclusive of more than mathematics ability alone.

Further, one particularly interesting result of this study was that student reports of college counseling were found to be more impactful than any increases in time spent on college counseling as estimated by school counselors. This could point to the benefits of college counseling at the individual level and its limitations in group formats, or it could be the result of inaccurate counselor estimations. The researcher recommends that a future study collect real-time data on counselor time use employing valuable procedures such as the experience sampling method. The researcher views this as perhaps the study's biggest limitation, given the shallowness of the research literature on this topic.

The qualitative sample also has limitations. The sample was chosen from schools with lower-than-average college-going rates that are also among participants in the College Ambition Program, a research project that provides additional support to schools to improve college-going. This may have provided a unique school environment not necessarily representative of schools generally. However, the researcher felt comfortable with this given that so many college-going support programs exist nationally and are very commonly found in schools. Future researchers might consider explorations into the experience of college counselors at more statistically average or better than average schools for an interesting qualitative comparison of experiences across a broader range of school and community types.

Implications for Practice and Policy

This study offers a unique view of college-going, postsecondary academic match expectations, college counseling, specifically within the confines of the school, and the role of school counselors in those processes. Implications emerged both from the data and from the research process itself. This research started with a meeting with state level bureaucrats who encouraged this study and wanted information on how they could change education policy, and counselor professional development standards for school counselors in particular, to improve college-going in the state. While the researcher did attempt to explore these topics, as interviews progressed, it was less obvious that the counselors needed more standards or development, but more obvious that they needed less on their plate and more organizational and structural support.

The data, the theory, and this study all point to the same conclusion - relationships matter, but relationships require time, and time is one tool school counselors do not have

at their disposal. This study did not provide any significant data, quantitative or qualitative, that school counselors suffer a lack of desire or appropriate information regarding college counseling. While previous research shows that school counseling programs do not typically include information regarding college counseling, and qualitative data in this study pointed to a similar conclusion, in-depth conversations with counselors revealed that this sample of counselors is quite well-versed in the key components of college counseling. Counselors appear to learn this information experientially and on the job – and they learn it quickly. They have to. This study does, however, show that the methods counselors have at their disposal to use that knowledge gained through experience is significantly inhibited by the structural constraints of the job.

If states, districts, and schools are to really take improving college-going seriously, and to use the professionals in the school most qualified to assist in that transformation, administrators and policymakers need to seriously consider how school counselors are spending their time and what responsibilities could be best handled by a different or new school professional. While every counselor interviewed reported spending a significant proportion of their time on testing administration, there the research process revealed no reason why those responsibilities are best suited to the work of counselors. On the contrary, it appears as though placing the burden of testing administration on the school counselor may have a significant negative effect on the ability of school counselors to offer robust, high-touch, individualized college-counseling, the kind of counseling that students from high-income families often rely on. While higher education often gets derided for administrative bloat, exploration of the

school counselor experience at the K-12 level for this study should make us consider whether our high schools suffer the effects of an anemic administrative structure.

The researcher's primary recommendation is that districts and the state consider a plan to increase the school counselor labor force at the high school level. By focusing on only high school, the state and districts can focus resources in the area of counseling most important for improving college-going rates. As an alternative, the researcher recommends that schools reassign testing administration duties to another school-based professional, or that they reassign them to a low-cost school-based professional equivalent to an administrative assistant. Optimally, districts would both hire additional high school counselors and reassign test administration duties to another school-based professional.

Lastly, one of the most unexpected experiences the researcher had while conducting this study was being thanked by the participants for asking for their voice. Nearly every school counselor interviewed thanked me profusely for interviewing them and told me how refreshing it was to be asked about their job. One even said, "Nobody has ever asked me what I do before!" As a researcher, this warm thank you was tremendous, but as someone who wants to do good work, see good work, and make good change, this was tremendously disheartening. School counselors shoulder many responsibilities and carry out a patchwork of tasks to support hundreds of students each day, yet even other school-based professionals often have little knowledge of the work of the position, and the counselors do not see any evidence that their colleagues and supervisors are interested in learning. While not an intended implication, these interactions spoke loudly to me; we must insist that our schools and school leaders

develop stronger organizational communication methods and push themselves to

understand the obligations and experiences of those doing this tremendously important

work each day.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Comprehensive Variable List

List and description of variables in the quantitative analysis in HSLS.

In order to link student to school data across HSLS surveys:

STU_ID: Student ID provides student-level identification number. Found in IDs and weights.

SCH_ID School ID provides school-level identification Number. Found in IDs and weights.

Student-Level Co-Variates (Sex, Race, Gender, Parent-Ed, Free and Reduced Price Lunch, Academic Performance)

X1SEX Student's sex is a dichotomous variable indicating the sex of the respondent. Found in BY student level composites.

X1RACE Student's Race/ethnicity composite. Found in BY student level composites.

X1PARE1EDU identifies parent one's highest level of education. Found in BY student level composites.

X1PAR2EDU identifies parent two's highest level of education. Found in BY student level composites.

X2STUEDEXPCT Variable that identifies student educational expectations for themselves. Recoded into high school or less, more than high school but less than 4 year, and 4 year or more.

X2PAREDEXPCT Variable that identifies parent educational expectations for students. Recoded into high school or less, more than high school but less than 4 year, and 4 year or more.

S2TALKHSCNSL Binary variable that identifies if students talked with the high school counselor about options after high school. Found in FY student instrument.

S2TALKCLGCNSL Binary variable that identifies if students talked about options with a counselor hired to prepare them for college admission.

X2TXMQUINT Identifies student mathematics performance as compared to peers by identifying student quintile level performance

School-Level Data (Counselor and Administrator)

C1HRSCOLLEGE Identifies the percent of total working hours counseling staff spent on college readiness/selection/applications. Found in BY counselor instrument.

A2HIGHERED Percent of 2010-2011 seniors who entered higher education. Found in F1 administrator instrument.

Appendix B: Participant Invitation Email

Dear [Participant],

My name is Ryan Goodwin, and I work with MSU's College Ambition Program, which is currently operating in your school. I am conducting a study of school counselors and postsecondary transitions and hope that you will support this work with your time and your voice by participating in an interview with me. The interviews will last approximately 60-90 minutes. I am confident that the study will have important implications for education policy related to school counselors and their day-to-day work.

I've attached a copy of the consent form with some additional information for your review. If you would be interested in sitting down with me soon to participate in the interview, or if you have any questions, please let me know!

From the Banks of the Red Cedar,

Ryan Goodwin

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

A Study of School Counselors and Postsecondary Transitions

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH: As you may know, Michigan State University

has been conducting research at your school as part of a study of youth and their college

ambitions. As an extension of this study, MSU has partnered with the Michigan

Department of Education to conduct a study on the role of school counselors in

successful postsecondary transitions. We are asking for your help to better understand the

work that school counselors do around postsecondary transitions in order to better inform

policymakers. TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation in this research would

involve participation in one interview. Interviews will be conducted with a member of

our research team. The time required for the interview will be 60-90 minutes.

DATA STORAGE TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY: We will keep your individual

responses private. No personally identifying information will be used in any reporting of

the data. No data that will allow you to be identified with an individual will be shared

with anyone at your school.

Data will be deidentified for storage, and stored by the Principal Investigator for a

minimum of 3 years in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. Records identifying

research participants (including interview transcripts, internal memos, and internal

reports) will be kept confidential and shared only among members of the research team.

Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may elect not to participate without

any penalty or loss of benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled. If you

participate at first, but later discontinue participation, you will not be subject to any

penalty or loss of benefits. Further, you may choose not to answer certain questions

without penalty or loss of benefits.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The risks involved in this study are minimal since the

questions are not extremely personal and do not ask you to reveal very personal or hurtful

information. However, potential risks may include possible psychological distress due to

discussing your current career. Additionally, if participants discuss information outside

the interview it is possible unintentional alienation from colleagues could result. It is

unlikely that there is any physical, legal or economic risk.

While there will be no immediate benefits to you, over the long term we hope this study

will inform investigators of the work that school counselors do in relation to the transition

to college. This may allow investigators to better inform policymakers.

If you have any concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to

do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the investigator, Dr. Barbara

Schneider by phone: (517) 432-0300, email: bschneid@msu.edu, or regular mail: 516

Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

If you have any questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant,

or would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint

about this research study, you may contact - anonymously, if you wish – Michigan State

Human Research Protection Program at (517) 355-2180, fax: (517) 432-4503, email

address: irb@msu.edu or regular mail: 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

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In some cases, written materials produced or audio tapes may be of value to the research.

The written and audio taped materials will be viewed only by the principal investigator,

members of the research team, and/or the Institutional Review Board at Michigan State

University. Indicate your consent for us to use these materials by checking on of the

following:

  ___ I consent to be audio taped

  ___ I do not consent to be audio taped

Your signature means that you agree to participate in this study. Participant's signature:

_____ Date:____/____/____

Name: _____

Appendix D: School Counselor Interview Protocol

School Name:

Interviewee Name:

Interviewer Name:

Date:

I.   **Intro Script:**

"This interview is part of a larger study on school counselors in Michigan. We're hoping to learn more about your role as a school counselor, what your daily activities include, as well as your thoughts on your role in the college-going process for students. I'm here not just with MSU, but also for MDE, who has asked us to consider what we can do to increase college-going in Michigan. We're hoping that your insight leads to improved policies in Michigan regarding school counselors and their work helping students get to college."

Provide Consent form and ask for signature.

Ask for consent to record the interview.

Begin Recording.

"This is _____ from Michigan State University. Today is _____, 2014 and I am at _____ High School interviewing _(interviewee says their name)_ about their role as a school counselor. I have provided a consent form that informed _____ about the risks and benefits. He/she has provided their signature and consent is that correct? _____ Just to confirm, you agreed to record this interview, correct? _____ I may wish to quote from this interview either in the presentations or articles resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used

in order to protect your identity, unless you specifically request that you be identified by your true name. Do you agree to allow me to quote from this interview?_____.

Great, now that we have that out of the way, I want this to be a conversation between us, but I also want to make sure I get all of the important information, so I may refer to my notes so we can make the most of our time. The first questions I have are about your entry into the field of counseling, so, can you…"

II.   Entry into the field

1. Tell me about how you decided to get into counseling? What attracted you about the job?

2. Tell me a little bit about your education background.

    a. What did you study in undergrad? Grad school?

    b. Did it/how did it help prepare you for the work you do here as a school counselor each day?

3. After all of that education, I'm sure you had a vision of an ideal school counselor – can you describe that ideal counselor to me?

4. Can you tell me about your role as a school counselor at this school specifically? How is it similar or different from the ideal you had in mind?

5. What would you say is the most stressful part of your job?

6. And what would you say is the most enjoyable part of your job as a school counselor?

7. And overall, do you enjoy being a school counselor?

8. Can you tell me about a typical day for you? How do you spend your time?

9. What are the busiest months or times of the year?

III.   Responsibilities

Script: It sounds like you wear many hats and do a lot of different things, so now I'm going to ask you some questions about what you do with respect to some of your responsibilities.

10. I'm going to give you a list of some of the activities that you might do on any given day. I'd like you first to consider what percent of your time you spend doing each task, and then I'll have some more questions about each item.

   a. Scheduling

      i. Tell me what the scheduling process entails for you.

      ii. Do you use any systems to support scheduling work?

      iii. What kind of support do you receive from other people in the building on this task

      iv. Are there any other resources that help you with scheduling?

      v. Who do you report to about this?

   b. Testing

      i. Tell me what the testing process entails for you.

      ii. Do you use any systems to support testing work?

       iii. What kind of support do you receive from other people in

the building on this task

       iv. Are there any other resources that help you with testing?

       v. Who do you report to about this?

c. Discipline

       i. Tell me about your involvement with discipline – how do

you fit into the equation?

       ii. Are there any systems in place that guide your work in the

discipline process?

       iii. What kind of support do you receive from other people in

the building with discipline?

       iv. Are there any other resources that help you with discipline?

       v. Who do you report to about this?

d. Crisis management

       i. Tell me what the crisis management entails for you.

       ii. Do you use any systems to support crisis management

work?

       iii. What kind of support do you receive from other people in

the building on this task

       iv. Are there any other resources that help you with crisis

management?

       v. Who do you report to about this?

e. Social/emotional

      i. Tell me about your role in offering social/emotional services.

     ii. Do you use any systems to support scheduling work?

    iii. What kind of support do you receive from other people in the building on this task

    iv. Are there any other resources that help you with offering social/emotional services?

     v. Who do you report to about this?

f. IEPs

      i. Tell me what the IEP process entails for you.

     ii. Do you use any systems to support IEP work?

    iii. What kind of support do you receive from other people in the building on this task?

    iv. Are there any other resources that help you with IEP?

     v. Who do you report to about this?

g. Postsecondary planning

      i. Tell me what the postsecondary planning process entails for you.

     ii. Do you use any systems to support postsecondary planning?

    iii. What kind of support do you receive from other people in the building on this task?

iv. Are there any other resources that help you with postsecondary planning?

v. Who do you report to about this?

vi. There's lots of conversation today about getting students to college, who do you think should go to college? Alternatively, who do you think shouldn't go to college?

    1. Tell me your thoughts on two and four year colleges. How should students decide which to go to? Do you encourage them toward either in any way?

vii. How do you see your role in the college-going process?

viii. Can you tell me about how you assist students with that process?

i. How do you help students identify and apply to colleges/universities/vocational training?

ii. Do you provide act/sat assistance to your students? In what form?

iii. Do you provide assistance or resources with the FAFSA and other financial aid activities?

iv. Are you involved with college visits or connecting students to college and university representatives?

ix. Can you tell me about any involvement or interaction you have with parents throughout the college-going process?

Conclusion

h. Are there any other major areas that I've left out?

11. And while juggling all of those responsibilities, how many students do you balance as well – what's the student:counselor ratio here?

IV. Job Changes

12. It's obvious that you have a lot on your plate - how much of what you thought you would be doing as a school counselor do you actually do each day? Examples?

b. How do you prioritize your tasks and workload each day?

c. Are there any duties or obligations you deal with that you feel distract you or take away from the core of your work as a school counselor?

13. What parts of your job do you wish you didn't have to do, or what might you change about your job?

14. I'm going to give you some hypotheticals and I want you to let me know how you would feel about them. There are a number of things that might change what your day or year looks like including referring some of your responsibilities to someone else. How would you feel if…

a. Someone else took over scheduling? Would that change your days significantly?

     b.   The school had a dedicated college counselor? Would that change your days significantly?

     c.   The school had a full-time community health counselor or social worker? Would that change your days significantly?

     d.   The school had an on-site substance abuse counselor? Would that change your days significantly?

     e.   If you were able to refer a portion of your responsibilities to a trained professional, what responsibilities would you most like to hand over to someone else?

V.   Training

15. Given all of your responsibilities, is there any area in which you feel like you would like more training?

16. And which area do you think you're most well-informed or trained?

17. If you could go to any place or any kind of school for that training, what would it be?

VI.   Conclusion

18. Is there anything that I didn't ask you that you think I should have? Or is there anything you want to say that I didn't give you the chance to say?

Script: It really has been a pleasure to speak with and learn from you today. You've given me a lot to think about and important insight into school counseling. I'll leave you with a card with my information on it. If you have any questions or think of something you would like to add or you would like me to know later, please feel free to contact me.

Appendix E: Table 10 – Model Variance

Model Variance

	Variance Component
Intercept 1	0.17
Intercept 2	0.06

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