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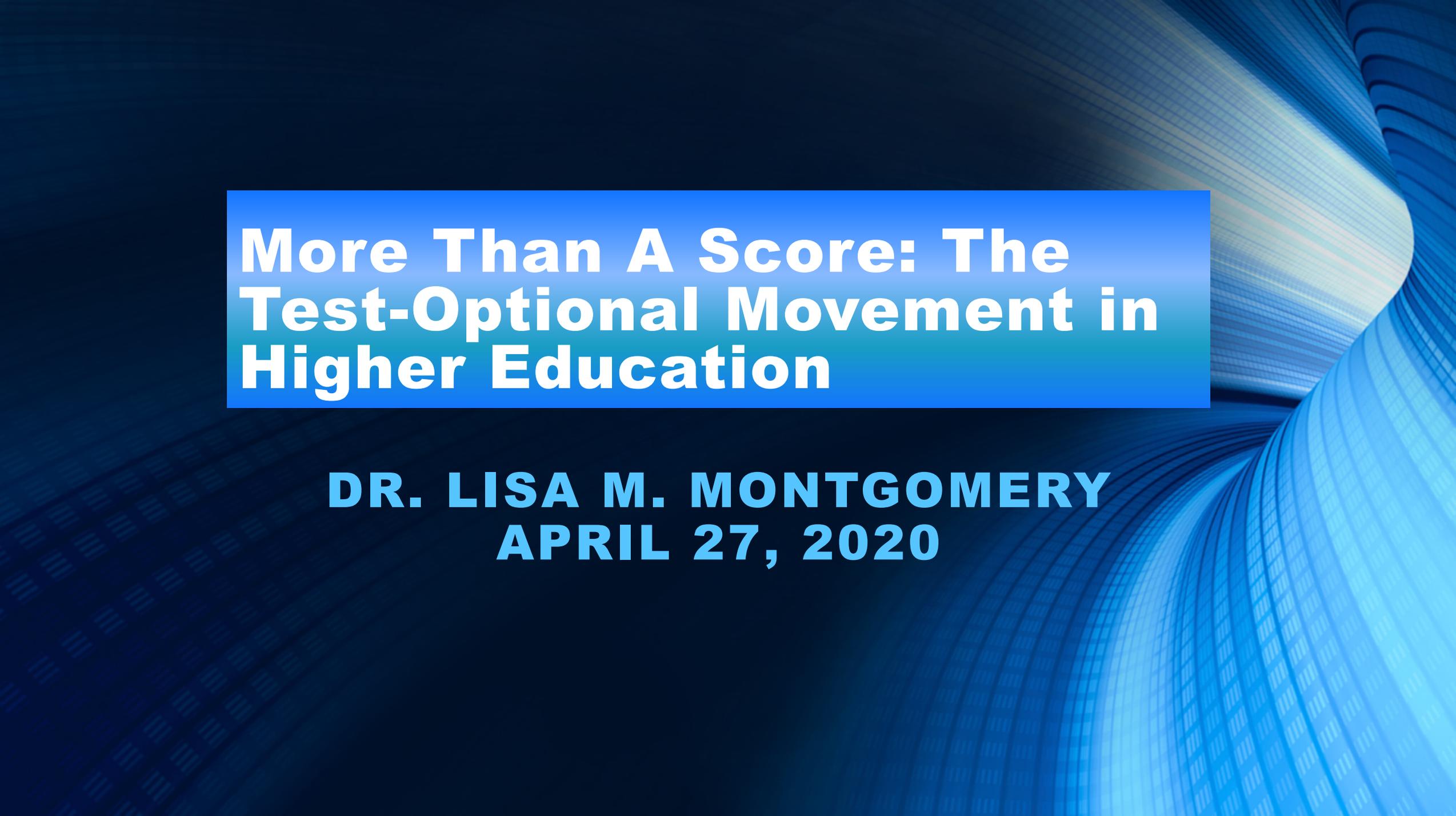
More Than A Score: The Test-Optional Movement in Higher Education

Lisa M. Montgomery

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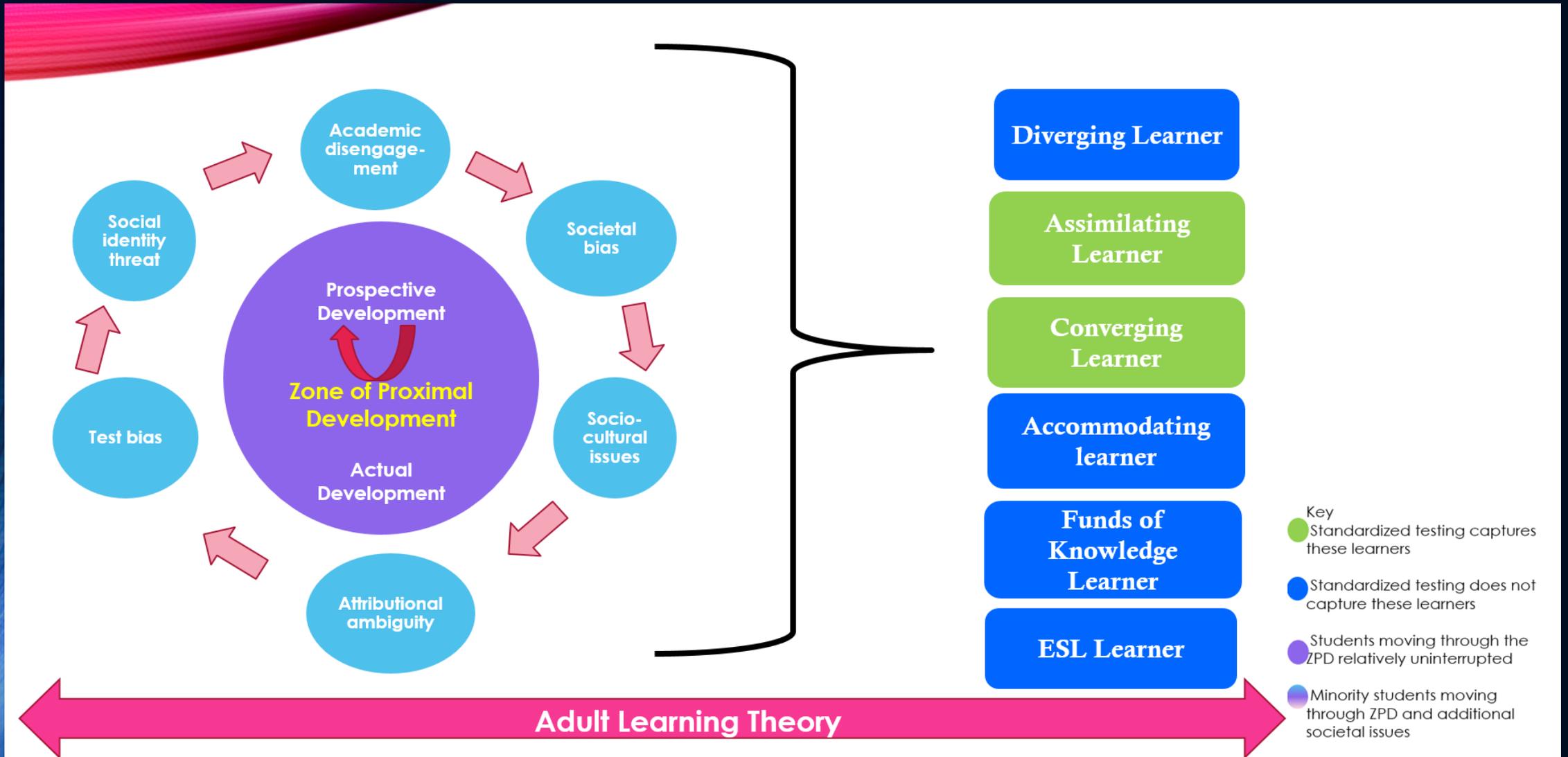
More Than A Score: The Test-Optional Movement in Higher Education

DR. LISA M. MONTGOMERY
APRIL 27, 2020

Agenda

- **Current State – Test-Optional Institutions**
- **Theoretical Framework**
- **Research Questions**
- **Type of Study**
- **Population and Sample**
- **Instruments**
- **Qualitative Analysis**

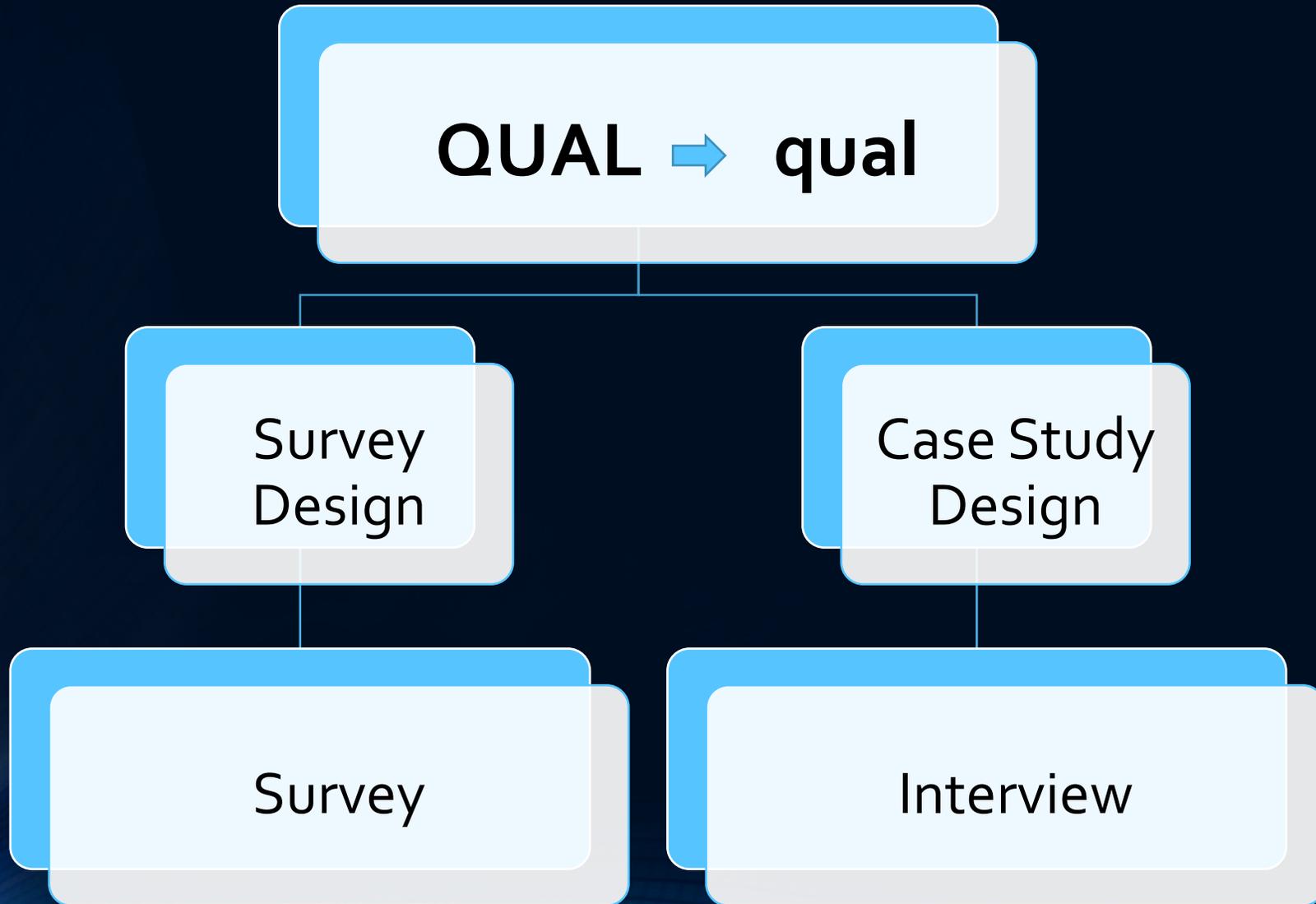
Theoretical Framework



Research Questions

- **Overall question – Why have many higher education admissions policies evolved to include a test-optional component for incoming students?**
- **Sub Questions**
 - **1. What was the decision-making process for schools implementing test-optional policies?**
 - **2. How did the higher education institutions implement the test-optional admissions policy?**
 - **3. What is/are policies the higher education institutions are utilizing to make an admissions decision?**
 - **4. What do admissions officers perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of test-optional policies?**

Type of Study



Population and Sample

- **All test-optional higher education institutions (public and private) in the United States that offer four-year Bachelor of Science and/or Bachelor of Arts degrees and a test-optional admissions process**
 - **For colleges and universities with multiple campuses, only the largest campus was included**
- **Admissions Officers from rural, urban and suburban settings**
 - **Titles of admissions officers: Chief Enrollment Officer, Undergraduate Director of Admissions, Vice President for Admissions and Enrollment**

Results – The Numbers

- **673 surveys sent to test-optional higher education institutions**
- **11 surveys returned completely answered**
 - **Several other surveys in Qualtrics had approved consent but were not completed by the admissions officer**
- **4 interviews conducted via Zoom**
 - **Interview participants answered “yes” to the follow up question on the survey sent out**

Qualitative Analysis

Analysis broken down into the following categories:

- **Category 1** - Decision to move to test-optional admissions process
- **Category 2** - Implementation of test-optional admissions
- **Category 3** - Policies informing test-optional admissions decisions
- **Category 4** - Perceived benefits/drawbacks to test-optional practices

Category 1 - Decision to Move to Test-optional Admissions Process

Diversity

- Identified in surveys and during interviews
 - “We also have a **desire to grow in students of color and low economic groups to benefit from this type of education** and we know that **SATs and ACTs are not exactly running in their favor** these days.” (Admissions Officer 7, survey)

Access

- **Geographically**
 - Taking students to SAT/ACT testing may cause a family hardship due to transportation
- **Financially**
 - Some students lack resources to pay for SAT preparatory courses and/or books
- **Equity of Instruction**
 - Some high schools include test preparation into their daily schedules and/or offer seminars for students to attend which may or may not involve a cost

Category 1 - Decision to Move to Test-optional Admissions Process

High School GPA

Research and study findings reflect high school GPA is a determinant of a student's ability to be successful in higher education

- Research
 - Allensworth & Clark (2020)
 - Syverson, Franks, & Hiss (2018)
 - Hiss & Franks (2014)
 - Study reflected only a 0.6% difference in graduation rate between submitters and non submitters
 - GPA between submitters and non-submitters 0.05 difference in GPA at graduation

Current Study

- Admissions officers shared:
 - HSGPA is a better determinant of a student's ability to be successful
 - **“Some students simply don't test well – we believe this to be true based on univariate HS GPA analysis. Yes, the two (test and GPA) are often related and relate to student success but we have enough examples of low test/high GPA success that we feel it more appropriate to put more weight on GPA.”**

Category 1 - Decision to Move to Test-optional Admissions Process

Attraction to University/College

Admissions officers shared the following:

- **Students seek a good fit for themselves and skill set**
- **Returning control/empowerment to the student by offering test-optional policy**

Alignment with University Mission

Admissions officers shared:

- **Need to realign/recalibrate to return to the original mission/vision of the college/university**
- **Not having a test-optional policy created violations in student success definitions**

Category 2 - Implementation of Test-Optional Admissions Practices

Student Applications

- **Survey Question – Where are increases in applications from?**
 - **Largest increase was from first-generation and under-represented minority groups**

GPA

- **Two questions asked to obtain information on this topic**
 - **1. What is the average GPA of students at the end of their freshmen year?**
 - **81% respondents indicated – 2.6 – 3.5**
 - **2. What is the average GPA of students at graduation?**
 - **54% - 2.9 – 3.1**

Application Volume

- **Regarding whether or not institutions noticed an increase in application volumes since implementing a test-optional policy**
 - **55% - application volume remained the same**
 - **36% - applications increased**
 - **1 institution reported a decrease in volumes since the implementation of test-optional policy**

Category 3 - Policies Informing Test-Optional Admissions Decisions

- **Institutions in my study use different items to make an admissions decision (3 main):**
 - **High school transcript**
 - **Letters of recommendation**
 - **Essays**
- **90% of the survey respondents indicated that the high school GPA is the major factor in the decision to admit a student applying test-optional**
- **“We serve a large percentage of first-gen students, and historically underserved student populations. Many of these students have not been deemed “college bound” by their high schools and subsequently, are not prepared for standardized tests.” (Survey)**

Category 3 - Policies Informing Test-Optional Admissions Decisions – Financial Impacts of Test-Optional Admissions

Scholarships – varied results

- **54% survey respondents – scores not required for scholarship consideration**
- **Some officers indicated scores do influence award**
- **3 interview participants indicated scores do not influence scholarship decisions**
- **Admissions Officer 3 – scores are a factor in the amount of merit received**
 - **One of top awards (\$35K) – students who achieve 1220 or greater**
 - **“Aptitude for testing”**
 - **Students within the top 5% of their graduating class and/or those with 1300 or greater on SAT (\$40K)**

Category 4 – Benefits of Test-Optional Policies

Benefits

- **Diversity and access**
- **Appeals to various types of students**
- **Non-Cognitive Factors**
 - **Expectancy Value Theory (Wigfield, 1994) – student’s motivation to succeed (intrinsic factors)**
 - **Academic and Social Integration – Tinto (1993) – student needs to be fully engaged socially and educationally to thrive and persist to graduation**

Drawbacks

- **Measurement**
 - **Admissions officers find it difficult to ignore when the scores are sent in**
 - **This drawback generally came from survey respondents (2)**
- **Grade inflation concerns**
 - **This drawback generally came from survey respondents (2)**
- **Making an admissions decision using students’ written responses**