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Viewing the Whole Student:
Creating Access by Incorporating a Holistic Review Method in Higher Education Admissions

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the
Department of Educational Foundations and Policy Studies
West Chester University
West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of
Master of Science

By
Delaney Logan

May 2021

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the talented faculty of the West Chester University Educational Foundations and Policy department for their dedication to my personal and professional growth over the last two years. They have challenged me to think critically about situations and have instilled in me a commitment to advocate for positive, social change for all. For that, I am forever grateful.

I would like to personally thank Dr. Jacqueline Hodes for being the upmost advocate for every student within the Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs graduate program. Your selflessness and commitment to supporting us has never gone unnoticed. I owe much of my success in this program to you and your endless support. I am truly thankful for you.

To my thesis advisor, Dr. Jeff McLaughlin, thank you for both challenging and supporting me throughout the process of writing my thesis. I could not have done this without your kind words of encouragement and thoughtful considerations. Thank you.

To my colleagues and friends of the HEP SA program, specifically Abbie, Elissa, Heather, Jordan, and Lezlie, you will never know how truly thankful I am to have had you all as my source of support and motivation these past two years. You have all taught me so much, and have been great sources of inspiration to look up to. I would not have made it through this program without you all. For these reasons, I am forever grateful for our friendship. And to Nicole, I would like to thank you for understanding me more than anyone and our commitment to supporting each other throughout the process of writing our theses.

And finally, I would like to thank my family and loved ones for providing me the space to pursue my dreams. Without you all, I would never be where I am today. Thank you.

Abstract

In this thesis, I will explore how higher education institutions can provide greater access to, and support for, students who do not meet traditional admissions requirements such as standardized test scores. This topic is important because traditional admissions requirements are inequitable for various groups of students, and they are also not accurate predictors of success in higher education for all students. My interest in this topic originates from my own personal experiences applying to and attending higher education, as well as my belief that higher education should be accessible to all who wish to pursue it. Therefore, barriers such as various admissions requirements should not be in place for students to access higher education. Within this thesis, I will note key core concepts from higher education and student affairs that intersect with the thematic concern. Then, I will propose an intervention designed to address the thematic concern. The intervention I propose centers around the creation and implementation of a holistic review method in the higher education admissions process for applicants who do not initially meet admission to an institution based on their standardized test scores. I will conclude the thesis by proposing a method for assessing the proposed intervention, which primarily involves randomly identifying a cohort of students admitted to the higher education institution using the holistic review method and following them throughout their time in higher education to review their progress and successes.

Keywords: Admissions, standardized testing, student success

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Chapter One: Introduction

When it comes to higher education admissions requirements, standardized test scores are arguably the most well-known, yet also most controversial, component to a college application. The two most notable standardized tests used in the college admissions process, the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and the ACT (American College Testing), are utilized by higher education institutions' admissions departments for a variety of reasons, but primarily to determine a student's acceptance based on predicting their academic success in higher education (Alcocer, 2019). Recent research, however, has found that these predictors have been shown to account for only a small amount of variance of a student's persistence and success in higher education (Sparkman et al., 2012). This factor has been suggested as particularly evident for nontraditional students, students from lower socioeconomic statuses, and those from various minority groups (Deil-Amen & LaShawn Tevis, 2010). I believe the underlying issue is in relation to the quality of high school educations and that students' access to educational resources are not the same across the board in high schools in the United States. Examples of such inequities include differences in access to standardized test preparation and tutors, access to transportation to exam centers, and even access to the knowledge needed to register for, take, and perform well on such exams (Jump, 2019). Therefore, why do higher education institutions utilize standardized test scores as one of the most significant deciding factors for whether a student is accepted into their institution?

The following points are noted to articulate why I believe there should be less emphasis placed on standardized test scores in the higher education admissions process:

From my personal experience as an undergraduate student and from the experiences of the students that I advise, higher education is a significant commitment for students. From a

financial standpoint, a mental health standpoint, as well as a substantial time commitment, deciding to pursue higher education is certainly not a decision students should take lightly. With this in mind, if students are willing to make such a commitment, it is my belief that barriers such as standardized test score admissions requirements should not be in place for students wishing to access higher education.

Secondly, even though standardized tests are claimed to be predictors of student success in higher education, this simply cannot be the case for all students. For many students, their experiences and successes during their time in high school differs greatly from their experiences and successes in college. This is particularly evident for nontraditional students (Deil-Amen & LaShawn Tevis, 2010). In fact, findings from a study conducted by Hoffman and Lowitzki (2005) indicate that high school grades are stronger predictors of student success in higher education than standardized test scores, particularly for racial minority students. This might be due to the previously mentioned fact that the quality of education and access to resources is simply not the same across the board among high schools in the United States (Jump, 2019). Students from lower-income communities often attend understaffed and underresourced schools that cannot provide the same quantity and quality of standardized test preparation as schools in higher-income communities (Jump, 2019). More so, supplemental test preparation apart from what is provided in high school settings is often expensive and therefore inaccessible for many students of lower socioeconomic statuses (Jump, 2019).

This factor, plus the fact that the majority of high school students prepare for and take the SAT/ACT before their senior year begins, poses the question of how accurate can such test scores be in predicting students' abilities to succeed in higher education? Students are much more than the score they receive on one exam; an exam that for many, including myself, is

highly stressful due to the extraordinary level of significance it places on students. Therefore, why should the outcome of one exam be the deciding factor of whether or not a student should be accepted into a higher education institution?

Furthermore, given the variety of benefits that a higher education experience can provide, students seeking to further their education should not be given barriers to access higher education. College is more than learning the skills needed to perform well in a specific career – it is a transformative experience – one full of both professional and personal growth and development (Williamson et al., 1949). Williamson et al. (1949) noted the purpose of higher education is to develop the whole student. If this is true, why do institutions deliberately reject this notion when determining students' admittance by only examining academic factors such as grade point averages and standardized test scores?

These concerns bring up the question of how can we as higher education and student affairs practitioners provide greater access and support for students who do not meet traditional admissions requirements such as minimum SAT/ACT scores? Instead of placing significant emphasis on SAT/ACT scores for determining the admission of a student, it is my belief that institutions should focus on creating holistic review approaches in their admissions processes. This would involve increasing focus on nontraditional predictors of college persistence and academic success such as extracurricular activities, employment history, letters of recommendation, and a student's socioeconomic background. Scholars have proposed this change as necessary since student success may be related to other variables, or even a combination of variables (Sparkman et al., 2012).

Additionally, higher education institutions should implement supportive programs for students who do not meet their traditional admissions criteria, such as standardized test scores.

Such program would grant higher education access to those students, but would most importantly provide them support and the knowledge of resources available to them at the institution as they pursue a degree in higher education. I believe that it is the incorporation of holistic review approaches in the admissions process, as well as the support from staff, faculty, and fellow students that can better ensure a student will succeed during their time in higher education and beyond.

Introduction to my Concern

As I reflect on my undergraduate experience, the most noteworthy phrase that comes to mind is invaluable personal growth. My overall experience was filled with both highs and lows, yet looking back, even the lows contributed to my personal growth and made me the person who I am today. Since then, this factor has altered the way I see the true purpose of higher education. It is one of the primary reasons I seek a degree in higher education and student affairs – to support students in their growth and development. I would like to acknowledge that I was, and still am, privileged to have been given the opportunity to pursue an undergraduate degree, and I would also like to acknowledge that not all students have the support and resources to pursue higher education. For this reason, it is my belief that higher education should be more accessible to all who wish to pursue it, and therefore barriers should not be in place for any student to access higher education. This belief of mine originates as a result of reflecting on my own personal experiences applying to and attending higher education, and the growth and development that occurred for me as a result of attending higher education.

Reflecting back on my educational journey, I cannot recall a moment in my adolescence that I did not consider attending college after graduating from high school. It just seemed like that was the societal norm – that young adults attend college, so I always thought that going to

college would be the next step in my life. I am aware now that this mindset is not a typical one for all high school students to have, yet my family and high school made it seem like pursuing higher education was just the thing people do after graduation. I remember my parents often reminding me that they worked hard in life for their children to not only go to college, but more importantly graduate, which is something my father was not able to do for himself. My parents instilled in me the mindset that I needed to work hard in school in order to be able to achieve that goal. Through my experience with advising students, I have come to understand that not all students have come from an atmosphere that encourages the pursuit of higher education. More so, not all students have parents or guardians with mindsets regarding college as mine did. This understanding has helped me develop my philosophy of education, as I will discuss later, as well as an important consideration in the creation of my proposed intervention.

Looking back, I was definitely naïve about how stressful and strategic the whole process of applying to and being accepted into higher education was. I would probably associate the majority of my unknowingness surrounding this topic with the lack of information and support provided by my high school. My high school did not have SAT/ACT preparation courses or standardized test taking techniques built into class curricula I was aware of the existence of businesses that, for a fee, will provide college or test preparation sessions to help you apply for college, but I certainly did not have the money at the time to afford that. I do not even think my high school teachers or guidance counselor ever encouraged us to seek out resources like that either. If my parents were aware that I was encouraged to take them, they might have been able to move some things around to make it work, but again, it was not something that was even on my parents' or my radar.

Ultimately, I think the nonchalant attitude of my high school toward the college application process for its students made me feel as though I was on the right track and that it would all fall in to place. I just wish the administrators at my high school better explained the whole process – what tests to take, how many times, how to prepare for them, what is a good score, etc. Yet, I do remember them telling us how important college entrance exams like the SAT/ACT were and how they will be the deciding factor of whether you get into college or not, or what type of college you get accepted into. But of course, they left out how to ensure you do the best you can on such exams. Through my research, I have found that this lack of understanding of the higher education admissions process is common for many high school students. This factor was also a key consideration in the creation of my proposed intervention. On top of that, I remember thinking that all my fellow classmates were making applying for college such a competition. Conversations such as, “What score did you get?”, “Oh I scored higher than you on this exam section”, “I got into x school. Where did you get into?”. I remember the whole process causing me a lot of stress though, particularly as I compared myself to what other students around me were doing. It made me question whether I was doing enough to get into college.

So when it came time for me to begin the college application process, I believe my mindset was along the lines of, “Let’s just see how I do on the exam and I’ll take it from there”. I took both the SAT and ACT; the ACT after taking the SAT and not scoring as well as I hoped I would. I did better on the ACT because, like they say, the ACT should be a better reflection of the content you learn in high school courses. Looking back, I think the reason why I decided to only take each one once was because the process for me was stressful and too competitive. Although this ultimately worked out for me, reflecting back on this action of mine showed me

how truly unprepared and unknowledgeable I was when it came to preparing for and applying to higher education. I would argue that this is how many students feel, particularly those from lower socioeconomic statuses and first generation students. After taking both exams, I applied to three colleges and universities, all of which were somewhat local to my home town. Two were more competitive, and expensive, than the other, which is the one I ultimately ended up choosing. By October of my senior year of high school, I got accepted into York College of Pennsylvania and pretty quickly made the decision to decide that was the place I wanted to attend college. It seemed like such a relief to make that decision and no longer having to feel like I was in competition with other students on who was going to what college after graduation. Ultimately, I chose York College because it cost significantly less than others that I applied to, and I would be receiving more financial aid. I also really liked the small size of the college, and I believed I would fit in well with a small student population and that I would receive more individualized support throughout my collegiate journey.

In addition to the lack of knowledge surrounding the college admission process, I also struggled with figuring out what I would like to study in college. The various classes I was enrolled in at my high school fostered my interest in so many different subjects - history, anatomy, psychology, art, etc. It seemed as if everyone else in my grade had one subject they excelled in, and consequently they planned to study that subject in college. Although I was aware college students were allowed to be undeclared upon entering college, it seemed as if not declaring a major meant that you were not as decisive, less committed, or not as successful as other students. The major that I selected before my senior year of high school even started ultimately did not end up being the one I ultimately received my undergraduate degree in – it was not the right major or future profession for me. Looking back at these decisions, however, I

wish I would have spent more time figuring out how my interests could better reflect a major and a future career that I would actually enjoy doing. For that reason, I wish there was some kind of support the college I was planning to attend could have given me over the summer before my first semester to explore my options in terms of area of study. Perhaps more importantly, I wish high schools and higher education institutions perpetuated an alternative ideology of encouraging students to explore their options in terms of area of study throughout their first semester or even first year of college.

Furthermore, my first semester of taking college level classes was a big adjustment for me. Nearly every assignment was completed and submitted online and I was not used to that in high school. Additionally, while tests in high school always came pretty easy to me, the exams in my first semester's college classes were much more difficult. The strategies I used in high school did not help me and it took me a while to finally figure out what strategies would work for my college classes. From my experience advising college students, I have found this abrupt transition that I had to be typical for first year students. Many students have expressed to me that they wish they could have been given additional guidance on successfully transitioning to college life. This is another key factor I considered in the creation of my proposed intervention. I might not have attended a highly-ranked and well-known school. I might have made many mistakes along the way in regards to declaring a major. I may have gotten an undergraduate degree in which I am not pursuing a profession in its related field. However, it was the opportunity to participate in a collegiate experience and the connections I have made subsequently that helped shape me into the person who I am today, and the person who I wish to become in the future. Higher education is a time of self-exploration, and therefore everyone should have access to it if they wish to discover more about themselves and learn from others in

society. For that reason, I am passionate about providing students who wish to access higher education to grow both personally and academically the access and ability to do so.

The classes I took in high school and the scores of the standardized tests I took to get accepted into higher education are not what determined my success in higher education. In actuality, it was the support from loved ones, fellow students, staff, and professors, as well as the knowledge of resources available on campus and the knowledge of strategies to best succeed that helped me persist and ultimately graduate with my undergraduate degree. It was the understanding of how to be resilient, seek help, and utilize self-care that helped me succeed. Therefore, it is evident that we as higher education and student affairs practitioners should provide all students the opportunity to learn more about the resources and supports available at a higher education institution to ensure success, not only in their academics, but in their journey of personal growth and development.

Furthermore, we need to be cognizant that not every student has supportive people in their lives. Not every student had high school teachers and administrators who encouraged them to pursue higher education. Not all students have parents and guardians who have gone to college themselves, and they therefore were not given the tips and tricks on how to access, persist, and graduate from college. Yet, students deserve that. For this reason, how are students expected to succeed in higher education if they are not being supported and are not aware of the resources that institutions set in place for students to utilize to be successful? That is where higher education and student affairs practitioners come in; to be the supportive resources to students to prepare them for success throughout their collegiate journey of academic and personal development.

Thesis Preview

In this thesis, I will explore how higher education institutions can provide greater access to, and support for, students who do not meet traditional admissions requirements such as standardized test scores. This topic is important because traditional admissions requirements are inequitable for various groups of students, and they are also not accurate predictors of success in higher education for all students. My interest in this topic originates from my own personal experiences applying to and attending higher education, as well as my belief that higher education should be accessible to all who wish to pursue it. Therefore, barriers such as various admissions requirements should not be in place for students to access higher education. The thematic concern will address three primary questions: How does the requirement of test scores in the college admissions process reinforce inequity among students accessing higher education? How effective are standardized test scores in predicting students' success in higher education (i.e. retention and graduation)? How can higher education institutions provide greater access to and support for students who do not meet minimum standardized test score requirements in the college admission process? In Chapter Two, I will discuss my philosophy of education, higher education, and student affairs. I will also describe why I am using Critical Action Research (CAR) as the framework for examining my thematic concern. In Chapter Three, I will provide historical context to the thematic concern, core concepts from higher education and student affairs literature that intersect with the thematic concern, as well as the current discourse surrounding the concern. In Chapter Four, I will propose an intervention to address the thematic concern. The intervention I propose is two-fold: the creation of a holistic review method in the higher education admissions process. This holistic review method will be an alternative to an institution's traditional admissions approach, which primarily reviews students based on their

high school grade point averages and standardized test scores. This holistic review method will be utilized for applicants who do not initially meet admission to the institution based on their standardized test scores. Instead, such applicants will then be reviewed on the basis of several non-academic factors through their responses to a variety of essay prompts. Upon their admission, the students will be referred to campus resources to utilize in order to best succeed throughout their higher education experience. These recommendations will be identified by admissions officers through reviewing the students' essay responses. In order to achieve its successful implementation, the intervention includes a training for admissions officers on this holistic review method. Finally, in Chapter Five, I will discuss how the proposed intervention can be implemented, including the timeline, budget, and funding, among other components. In addition, this chapter includes a proposal for how the intervention might be assessed. The assessment will come in two forms: assessment of the admissions officers' training and assessment of the holistic review method. The assessment of the holistic review method primarily involves randomly identifying a cohort of students admitted to the higher education institution using the holistic review method and following them throughout their time in higher education to review their progress and successes. I conclude the thesis by providing a few limitations to the proposed intervention, as well as key points to keep in mind while looking ahead in terms of this thematic concern.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Frameworks

In Chapter One, I introduced the thematic concern of how traditional admissions requirements such as standardized test scores are inequitable for various groups of students, and are also not accurate predictors of success in higher education for all students. In addition, I introduced my positionality surrounding this topic and why I am dedicated to providing increased access and support for students in higher education. Next, in Chapter Two, I will discuss my philosophy of education, higher education, and student affairs. I will also describe why I am using Critical Action Research (CAR) as the framework for examining my thematic concern.

Philosophy of Education, Higher Education, and Student Affairs

As microcosms of the surrounding community and the country as a whole, higher education institutions serve to educate our citizens, yet they have the ability to do much more than simply educating. Higher education has the ability, and arguably the duty, to advance both the academic and personal growth of its students. Even more, they have the duty to educate their students to become active citizens and leaders of the present and future, as well as the ability to empower others in changing society for the better. The purpose of higher education can be better articulated through one's philosophy of higher education. To be most successful in the field of higher education and student affairs, professionals develop and adhere to their philosophy of education, an articulation of the driving force behind all aspects of their work. A philosophy of education gives voice to our intentions and guiding principles in the work we do. Furthermore, a philosophy of education articulates one's beliefs of the purpose of higher education. With those guiding principles in mind, one can be continuously cognizant that the work they do in the field follows the true purposes of higher education. My philosophy of higher education is based upon

four pillars: the university should encourage the pursuit of learning, not the acquisition of information, the university should promote democratic practices, the university needs to be aware of the individuality of its students, and the university should be without condition.

Pursuit of Learning

First, a fundamental purpose of higher education is for institutions to encourage students in the pursuit of learning, not simply the acquisition of information. As Oakeshott (Fuller, 1989) noted, upon entering college, an undergraduate stands in a “middle moment of life when he knows only enough of himself and of the world which passes before him to wish to know more” (p. 125). Higher education, therefore, is neither a beginning nor an end for a student, but acts as a milestone to symbolize one’s desire to grow as an individual and lead a more significant life. In his Ontological Vocation Theory, Freire (1970) stated that humans have an innate desire to fully develop themselves into better, more civilized, humans. As before, this is a continuous process in life, not an end point one can achieve. Higher education should act as a significant part in a student’s life to provide them with the experiences needed to further develop their ontological vocation. As Dewey (1938) asserted, “the most important attitude that can be formed is the desire to go on learning” (p. 73). Higher education and student affairs practitioners should focus on providing spaces and experiences that encourage the pursuit of learning. This can be demonstrated through the analysis of Dewey’s principle of Continuity of Experience. This principle asserts that all experiences both past and present are carried forward and influence future experiences for an individual. A student builds on their prior educative experiences and utilizes them to open the door, in a positive direction, for new and more positive educative experiences in the future. These future experiences are directly affected by the quality of those which came after. Oakeshott’s (Fuller, 1989) assertion that “the scholar as teacher will teach, not

how to draw or to paint, but how to see,” (p. 124) further describes this point of the purpose of the pursuit of learning and Dewey’s principle of Continuity of Experience. A truly effective professor or student affairs practitioner will teach their students how to see and understand a concept using a particular lens or framework, and not simply teach how to complete a certain task. Learning how to “see” inspires students to wish to learn more, and provides them the ability to utilize that skill to accomplish more, such as “drawing” and “painting”. Therefore, one of the most apparent purposes of a university is to exist as a home of learning and a place where a tradition of learning is preserved and imparted to its students (Fuller, 1989).

Higher education and student affairs practitioners have the key role of assisting in this holistic development, learning, and action of the students they serve. This can be best articulated in the founding document of the profession of student affairs, *The Student Personnel Point of View* (Williamson et al., 1949). The document noted that educational institutions:

have the obligation to consider the student as a whole...His intellectual capacity and achievement, his emotional make up, his physical condition, his social relationships, his vocational aptitudes and skills, his moral and religious values, his economic resources, and his aesthetic appreciations. (p. 2)

This quote highlights the importance of emphasizing the development of a student as a person rather than focusing on their academic training alone. Higher education institutions should not be a machine for producing a particular result or a particular type of student. In fact, students have the opportunity to gain valuable life experiences throughout their time in higher education, many more than just the training for a profession in society. Indeed, higher education has a role in the society of which it is part, but it should not be to manufacture and reproduce things that are only beneficial for another aspect of society, such as the economy. These concepts articulate how

crucial it should be for higher education institutions to increase access for all students wishing to pursue learning, as well as the growth and development of themselves, since higher education provides students with much more than just the knowledge needed for an occupation.

Democratic Practices

The second pillar of my philosophy of higher education is that the university should promote democratic practices. Students themselves seek the pursuit of learning through their attendance of higher education (Dewey, 1938). As a decision that will impact the rest of their lives in various ways, students should have the right to hold a greater stake in how they learn and the experiences they obtain in an academic and social setting. Higher education and student affairs practitioners can ensure students achieve this by discussing with students their interests and goals, then taking their students' ideas and turning them into concrete plans for positive, individualized educative experiences. Dewey (1938) noted that, "democratic social arrangements...(with) mutual consultation and convictions promote a better quality of human experience, one which is more widely accessible and enjoyed" (pg. 65). Enacting these democratic social arrangements, with assistance from student affairs practitioners, allows students to tailor their experiences to their personal goals and objectives. Indeed, more students might be interested in attending and persisting through higher education if the experience was more personalized and autonomous.

As an active participant in their own education, students should also be active participants in their democratic society. Williamson et al. (1949), in *The Student Personnel Point of View*, assert that a central purpose of education is for a greater realization of democracy in every phase of a student's life. Ideally, a university should desire their matriculated students and alumni alike to utilize the democratic practices they have learned during their time in higher education to

work to find solutions to societal problems throughout their entire lives. Therefore, institutional goals for student success should be aimed toward enhancing societal growth, in conjunction with the education and development of the individual student. Higher education and student affairs practitioners should deliver experiences and opportunities that develop in their students a “firm and enlightened belief in democracy, a matured understanding of its problems and methods, and a deep sense of responsibility for individual and collective action to achieve their goals” (Williamson et al., 1949, p. 112). As students are active and responsible participants in their democratic society, their institution should place an emphasis on establishing their students’ democratic practices, as well as their students’ inclinations to promote and develop these practices among fellow citizens (Williamson et al., 1949).

With the notion of democratic practices in mind, higher education institutions have the obligation to support their surrounding communities, with every initiative created on their part intended to lead to improvement for the community. The partnership between university and the local community is mutually beneficial – it provides learning opportunities for students, while at the same time ensuring and implementing improvements for the local community. For example, students would be given learning opportunities to work on actual, real-world problems facing their campus, community, government, and industry. This mutual beneficial partnership will ensure the success of higher education institutions, the students they educate, and the community they inhabit (Cortese, 2003). As the temporary homes to the future leaders of our country and the world, higher education institutions have a duty to educate their students in a way to ensure their leadership in the future. Furthermore, universities are microcosms of the surrounding community, which suggests an obligation for higher education institutions to educate students and the surrounding community on democratic practices to benefit society as a whole.

Individuality of Students

Third, the university needs to be aware of the individuality of its students. Dewey (1938) described this pillar by claiming that students should be viewed as “individuals, rather than as entries in an impersonal roster” (p. 111). More than ever, “traditional” students at higher education institutions are no longer in the majority. Students seeking higher education degrees are more diverse and are from varying backgrounds than ever before in American history (Espinosa et al., 2019). As Dewey’s Principle of Interaction states, higher education and student affairs practitioners must be aware of the internal factors, such as personal needs and desires, that determine the type of experience a student will have (Dewey, 1938). These internal factors need to be taken into account before external factors, such as how the experience is taught, can be executed by professionals in the field of higher education and student affairs. Both internal and external factors, however, are necessary to provide a positive, individualized, educational experience. The interaction between the two factors constitutes the student’s learning environment and will predict the student’s success in their higher education experience. Furthermore, it is evident that individuals have differences in their backgrounds, such as socioeconomic status, race, and gender, as well as varying differences in abilities, interests, and goals. Higher education professionals need to be cognizant of how these differences in identities might affect the lives of their students and how they might influence students’ educational and personal growth while pursuing higher education. Therefore, higher education and student affairs practitioners must utilize flexibility in the shaping of content and in the method of administering services to fit the individual identities of students. This further demonstrates the necessity of utilizing holistic review approaches in the higher education admissions process, as approaches such as this value the individuality of students. With this concept of individuality in mind,

students will more likely be considered for admission with their best aspects and qualities.

Without Condition

The fourth pillar to my philosophy of higher education is that a university should be without condition. According to Derrida (2002), a university should “demand academic freedom, an unconditional freedom to question and to assert, the right to say publicly all that is required by research, knowledge, and thought concerning the truth” (p. 202). As an integral part in society devoted to providing the pursuit of learning to its citizens, the university should have the right to profess the truth. In fact, its students deserve to be taught the truth. The university should be not threatened and manipulated by other parts of society to withhold the truth from its students, nor teach the untruth. With the university’s commitment to the truth, faculty, staff, and students should have the freedom to critically deconstruct what is perceived to be the truth. This can be done through the process of deconstruction, a challenge to binary thinking, and the attempt to overturn this thinking by creating space for a new concept to take its place. As Derrida said, “the idea of deconstruction is to disturb tranquility in order to create a new way of thinking” (p. 202). Although the process of deconstruction can be enacted anywhere, higher education institutions are a unique part of society for deconstruction to happen due to their innate ability of educating others. With this in mind, the process of deconstruction can be utilized to disturb and overturn the current functions of a university, even inequitable admissions processes.

This ultimately further promotes positive social change for the community and world as a whole, as students are educated on why this change is crucial for the future, as well as how to enact such change. Higher education institutions can practice deconstruction through the enactment of a shift in their members’ thinking, values and actions. This can be accomplished through the efforts I have described in the previous two pillars – students learn more than just

knowledge, but instead how to make change, understand systems, be leaders, challenge the status quo, collaborate, address complex issues, and transform not only themselves, but their futures (Sustainability Advisory Committee, n.d.). Yet, this shift in thinking, values, and actions on an institutional level is not simple, as societal ideologies are so salient that they interfere with the way education is enacted. This change in mind-set calls for the transformation of education on all levels, promoting a systemic perspective that emphasizes collaboration and cooperation, as well as justice and equity for all. However, this change can be done one step at a time. Perhaps adjusting admissions policies for students who do not meet traditional requirements, and then providing such students the support needed to succeed in college might be a starting point for transforming higher education institutions into more accessible and equitable places for learning and development.

The Role of Student Affairs

Student affairs arguably has just as much significance in determining a student's success in their higher education journey as academic affairs. Therefore, it is imperative that student affairs and the professionals within this department are, in conjunction with academic affairs, creating experiences for students that follow their institution's mission and goals. These goals are often created with the purposes of education, and more specifically, higher education in mind, such as the four pillars within my philosophy of education. Given the four pillars I have articulated, student affairs has the responsibility to ensure such purposes of higher education are the driving force behind all that they do for their students. With that being said, all experiences and opportunities they provide for students should: encourage the pursuit of learning, not simply the acquisition of information, promote democratic practices, be created in a way to support the individuality of students, and be without condition.

As the concept of the co-curriculum suggests, learning experiences outside of the classroom are meant to complement learning done inside the classroom. This process, in turn, enhances student growth and development, both academically and personally. With extensive knowledge in student development and learning, student affairs practitioners have the responsibility to create intentional learning opportunities in the co-curriculum for the students they serve. In collaboration with academic affairs, student affairs can create co-curricular experiences and opportunities for students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values needed to do what the four pillars in my philosophy of higher education suggest: acquire the pursuit of learning, participate in more democratic practices, appreciate the individuality of themselves, and learn to be able to question things that are not right, and therefore advocate to fix them.

I am pursuing a degree and profession in higher education and student affairs to ensure all students have the support and access to resources needed for them to be successful in higher education and beyond, particularly through their development both personally and academically. I am committed to providing greater educational and developmental experiences than were given to students who came before them. We as higher education and student affairs professionals have the responsibility to educate our students on the truth of the world and provide them the tools to make the world a better place to live in. Through articulating and continuously analyzing one's purpose of higher education, higher education and student affairs professionals ensure that the work they do by serving students falls in line with the true purposes of higher education.

Statement on Critical Action Research

Critical Action Research

To better understand the thematic concern and the methods with which to best address this issue within the proposed intervention, I am utilizing a critical action research lens. Action

research, as defined by Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (2001), is:

a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview... It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (p. 1)

Stated simply, critical action research is a method for conducting research with the primary focus on the identification a real life problem and working with those who are personally affected by such problem to find solutions to it. Unlike traditional forms of research, action research challenges the belief that knowledge is known by the researcher, not the participants (Kemmis, 2008). Action research, therefore, also challenges the traditional research belief that in order for research to be credible, the researcher must remain objective and keep out their values and beliefs of the issue at hand (Brydon et al., 2003). Instead, action research is unique in such that, as Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) explained, it

embraces the notion that knowledge is socially constructed and, recognizing that all research is embedded within a system of values and promotes some model of human interaction, we commit ourselves to a form of research which challenges unjust and undemocratic economic, social and political systems and practices. (p. 11)

Action research embraces the experiences and knowledge held by the people who are directly affected by the issue of which is being researched. Therefore, it encourages positive social change through the utilization of democratic social practices. Such democratic social practices include encouraging the people affected to reflect on their own experiences and perspectives and then working together to gain a collective understanding of the issue.

In action research, the role of the researcher is especially different compared to traditional forms of research. As previously mentioned, the researcher in action research is not the all-knowing expert of the issue at hand (Kemmis, 2008). Ernie Stringer reiterates this factor when he suggested that the task of the researcher should be to:

provide people with the support and resources to do things in ways that will fit their own cultural context and their own lifestyles. The people, we knew, not the experts, should be the ones to determine the nature and operation of the things that affected their lives.

(Brydon et al., 2003, p. 14)

For this reason, the researcher serves more as a supportive resource for the participants than the objective fly on the wall. In fact, action researchers are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and perspectives surrounding the issue along with the participants. By understanding how one's positionality affects the research, one can better understand how their blind spots might also affect the research. More importantly, one can better understand how important collaboration with the affected community will contribute to more effective solutions.

Indeed, the researcher does hold a significant amount of knowledge surrounding the topic, particularly when it comes to theory surrounding the issue. This is where the critical part of critical action research comes in. The critical component of critical action research emphasizes using theory that is motivated by a deep concern for social justice (Kemmis, 2008). Karl Marx (1967) asserted that the notion of 'critique' in critical theory means "exploring existing conditions to find how particular perspectives, social structures, or practices may be irrational, unjust, alienating or inhumane" (Kemmis, 2008, p. 125). More so, it is the understanding of how these practices are intertwined to produce outcomes such as the issue within our research.

Therefore, it is the duty of the researcher to educate participants in this understanding, and then

utilizing this knowledge to find changes to stop these consequences from happening, particularly as it relates to the issue at hand (Kemmis, 2008).

One final note regarding critical action research that makes it unique from traditional forms of research is that its primary focus is on doing, rather than simply theorizing (Brydon et al., 2003). While traditional forms of research focus on gathering data and publishing it to be a point of reference for others, critical action research prioritizes the actions, or solutions, that the research group works together to enact in order to make positive social change in the community. More so, critical action research is ideally meant to apply to only the community in which is conducting the research, as the experiences of other communities in a similar situation might not benefit from the same solutions. With this in mind, critical action research is a continuous process, meant to repeat and evolve over the course of time to continue making positive social change by advancing practices (Brydon et al., 2003). This continuous process ensures the solutions proposed and enacted for the affected community are best fitted for them at the given point in time.

Critical Action Research in Higher Education and Student Affairs Practice

The utilization of critical action research is an important framework to use for higher education and student affairs for various reasons. First and foremost, critical action research is done for the purpose of creating positive social change for a group of people, not simply just doing research to report one's findings. For this reason, critical action research focuses on real life problems, not arbitrary ones those higher education and student affairs might assume is affecting their students, and focusing on enacting actual change for those affected by such challenges. Students are actively facing challenges throughout their time in higher education and therefore we owe it to them to find solutions for these challenges in order to ensure their success

in higher education.

Secondly, critical action research is useful in higher education and student affairs because it emphasizes the collaboration with those directly affected by the issue – in this case – students. As Brydon et al. (2003) noted, action research is better able to produce valid results than traditional research methods because “expert research knowledge and local knowledges are combined and because the interpretation of the results and the design of actions based on those results involve those best positioned to understand the processes: the local stakeholders” (p. 25). Therefore, it is obvious that when it comes to conducting research for the benefit of students, one should be encouraging them to collaborate in such process in order to produce the best solutions for those affected.

Thirdly, as critical action research emphasizes the tailoring of research for a select group of people instead of generalizing the findings for anyone, this framework is especially useful in higher education and student affairs. This is evident because student demographics and their experiences often vary greatly across higher education institutions, so generalizing the findings from a group of students at one institution might not be the best solution for a similar group of students at a different institution. Additionally, students are typically only in higher education for a few years, so utilizing the same solutions for a group of students from research done at the same institution ten or even five years ago might not be the best solutions for current students. Finally, higher education and student affairs practitioners are dedicated to promoting the holistic growth and development of the students they serve. Welcoming them into a critical action research group to address the challenges that they, and their similar peers, face during their time in higher education will promote their growth and development in many areas. Not only will they learn more about themselves and how their experiences have shaped them, they will also learn

how various social structures and practices are in place that have negatively contributed to the challenges they are actively facing. This might instill in them a sense of responsibility to stand up against such structures and practices and therefore become positive social change agents in their community, now and in the future.

Critical Action Research in my Thematic Concern

Critical action research is an important framework for me to study this thematic concern for the reasons I have noted above. First, the exploration of access and support for students who do not meet standardized test admissions requirements is a problem that is actively affecting students applying for admission into higher education. For this reason, utilizing critical action research will allow me to critically acknowledge and then deconstruct the social systems and practices that are set in place to block higher education access for such students. Using critical action research to address this thematic concern is most notably important due to its unique component of collaborating with those who are directly affected by the issue. It is critical for me to emphasize that as the researcher in this thesis, I am in no way an expert on this topic. It is the students who are actively and most recently affected by this issue who possess the most knowledge, specifically as it relates to how it affects them. Specifically, students know best what resources they wish they could have received or need to now receive in order to access and succeed in higher education. It is the culmination of varying student experiences surrounding this topic that will produce the best solutions. By prioritizing students' experiences and participation through a critical action research framework, I can ensure students feel as though they are key contributors to their own success, as well as their peers in similar situations. Furthermore, participation in critical action research for the purpose of this concern can provide students the confidence needed to persist in achieving their goals in higher education and beyond.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

In Chapter Two, I discussed my philosophy of education, higher education, and student affairs. I also described why I am using Critical Action Research (CAR) as the framework for examining the thematic concern. Next, in Chapter Three, I will provide an overview of the historical context of the thematic concern. Then I will examine the core concepts from higher education and student affairs literature that intersect with the thematic concern. Additionally, I will address the current discourse surrounding the thematic concern. Finally, I will conclude the chapter by noting several best practices in the field of higher education and student affairs about addressing this concern.

Historical Context

Admissions requirements for American colleges prior to the twentieth century were often specific to each institution. Yet, they often emphasized similar skills and qualities for students to possess in order to obtain admission to their institution. In the 1903 publication of *A Historical and Critical Discussion of College Admission Requirements*, author Edwin Broome (1903) noted that colleges in the colonial period of the United States primarily admitted students based on their proficiency of both the Latin and Greek language. A transcript of Harvard College's terms of admissions from 1655, noted,

When any Scholler is able to read and understand Tully, Virgill or any such ordinary classical authors, and can readily make, speake, or write true latine in prose, and hath skill in makeing verse, and is completely grounded in the greek language, so as to be able to construe and gramatically to resolve ordinary greek...he shall be capable of his admission into Colledge. (Broome, 1903, p. 18)

These proficiencies, along with the knowledge of basic arithmetic, were primarily the only

requirements necessary for entrance into higher education until the nineteenth century (Broome, 1903). This, as Broome (1903) noted, was most likely due to the fact that nothing beyond the knowledge of those three subject matters was necessary in preparation for the curriculum at colleges during this period of time.

The last half of the eighteenth century brought about many changes in the religious, social, and political conditions in the United States. This resulted in a call for higher education curricula to include subjects of more practical value. Such subjects included those of the sciences, geography, mathematics, and history. Consequently, college admissions began introducing entrance subjects during the first half of the nineteenth century (Broome, 1903). By the end of the nineteenth century, however, admissions procedures still varied greatly from one college to another. There was still no substantial agreement among the predominant colleges in the United States as to what subjects and how many should be required for admission. This, in particular, negatively impacted high schools and their students due to the fact that high schools did not know how to best prepare their students to gain admission to higher education institutions (Broome, 1903). In response, the College Entrance Examination Board, now simply known today as College Board, was formed in 1901 to establish uniformity in admissions requirements and procedures among colleges in the United States (Valentine, 1961). Their task was three-fold: create uniform entrance examinations, create a uniform set of high school courses based on the content within the entrance examinations, and bridge the relationship between high schools and colleges to set and grade the examinations (Valentine, 1961).

Within a few decades, the College Board sought to develop an entrance examination to be utilized by students applying to higher education institutions across the entire United States (Alcocer, 2019). The College Board sought inspiration from Alfred Binet, the inventor of the

first IQ test, and Robert Yerkes, a Harvard professor who administered IQ tests to two million World War I army recruits. In response, they charged Carl Brigham, a Princeton University psychology professor, member of the Eugenics movement, and colleague of Yerkes, to develop the examination. Brigham was selected as a result of The College Board reviewing his 1923 book, *A Study of American Intelligence* (Brigham, 1923). The data gathered from Yerkes' army IQ tests influenced Brigham in asserting that differences in intelligence among races were genetic in nature. Brigham asserted that American intelligence was declining in the early decades of the twentieth century as a result of non-“Nordics” immigrating to the United States. Furthermore, he suggested that this decline in American intelligence would only continue to decrease as a result of increases in interracial marriages (Brigham, 1923). As a result, Brigham created the Scholastic Aptitude Test, now simply known today as the SAT, for College Board. The SAT was first administered on June 23, 1926. By the end of the 1930s, the SAT was utilized by all the Ivy League schools as a method for determining scholarships for their admitted students. By 1968, the University of California system becomes College Board's biggest client. This year marked College Board's solidification of the use of the SAT for determining admissions for higher education institutions across the United States (Epstein, 2009).

Since its conception, the SAT has been altered and revamped many times to better reflect the scholastic aptitude, or achievement, of students seeking access into higher education. Yet, its history suggests it was created and utilized for nearly a century by higher education institutions in the United States to limit access to various groups of students. Such students include, but are not limited to, women, those of minority groups, lower social classes, first generation students, students with disabilities, and students for whom English is not their first spoken language. By analyzing the various forces and events in history, both at the university and societal levels, that

have historically and continue to shape higher education admission functions, one may be better able to understand this concern.

Throughout American history, higher education institutions focused on instilling their superiority from other institutions in both the nation and overseas. Labaree (2017) noted four rules institutions used to enforce this superiority in his writing, *A Perfect Mess: The Unlikely Ascendancy of American Higher Education*. The rules can be summarized as follows: the older the institution, the greater access to the wealthiest families, who create more substantial endowments, which equals more institutional funding. All of this maintains the status quo of the institutions' superiority to preserve their advantages over other institutions (Labaree, 2017). Higher education institutions focused on preserving their superiority over other institutions in many ways, but most evidently in terms of the students they accept of those they deny. One example of how institutions maintained this status quo was by incorporating an aptitude test in their entrance requirements. Such examinations allowed institutions to provide a better justification for admitting students who will ensure this preservation. These desirable students, who were predominantly white, Christian men, were not only considered to be more intellectually apt than students of minority groups. They were also considered to come from families of better financial means, which would further benefit the institution's growth and success (Rosales, 2019).

Even college administrators had strong thoughts on this belief of racial superiority in higher education. The president of Columbia University from 1902 to 1945, Nicholas Murray Butler, described the quality of Columbia's 1917-18 freshman class as "depressing in the extreme. It is largely made up of foreign born and children of those but recently arrived in this country." More so, Butler was instrumental in establishing College Board and Columbia was the

first university to use intelligence tests in its admissions process (Weissglass, 1998).

Throughout their history, colleges have altered their definitions of merit in ways that best helped them preserve their status as prestigious and powerful institutions. According to Jerome Karabel's (2005) *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion*, administrators at several elite colleges would often alter their entrance requirements to exclude some and admit others when deemed necessary. For example, for one student, more emphasis would be placed on their character, but for another student, more emphasis would be placed on their academic intelligence. This, according to Karabel (2005), was done to deny access to those individuals the institution deemed undesirable.

Although much of the blatant racism and exclusion of the early part of the twentieth century has diminished in recent decades, the elitist values and prejudices embedded in the origins of the SAT have still persisted. Though several federal programs had been enacted in the second half of the twentieth century to provide greater access to higher education for students of various underrepresented groups of students who had not previously had access, these federal programs have still created equity-related implications for students trying to access higher education.

Higher education enrollment in the United States expanded significantly following World War II, both in terms of numbers and demographics (Rentz, 2004). The nation's undergraduate student body was becoming somewhat less homogenous, making higher education more accessible and welcoming for a greater variety of students than ever before. The 1960s and 1970s saw some of the most dramatic expansion of access to higher education in the nation's history. The creation of the Higher Education Act of 1965 under the Johnson Administration and Pell Grants in 1972 gave the federal government authority over almost every aspect of the nation's

higher education system (Snyder, 1993). The federal budget for education was nearly doubled to provide greater support, and therefore access, to unprecedented numbers of low-income, Black, Latinx, and female students (Snyder, 1993). By the end of the 1960s, college enrollment was as large as 35 percent of the 18 to 24-year-old population in the United States (Snyder, 1993). Furthermore, the 1960s saw major changes to campus culture. According to Rentz (2004), this period of higher education was known as the age of student activism and civil disobedience. More than ever, college students were reflecting on the various social movements currently happening in society and wanted to challenge injustices and systems of authority, both in their society and at their institution. At the college level, student protests increased in intensity due to immense growth in student enrollment, large class sizes, residential overcrowding and coursework that did not reflect contemporary societal issues (Rentz, 2004). It might be correct to suggest that the student movements of the time would certainly not have been as notable to society without the vast amount of public money placed into higher education from the Johnson Administration.

Concurrently, neoliberal economists such as Milton Friedman and James M. Buchanan suspected a connection between free public education and the anti-authoritarianism of radical student movements on college campuses (Cooper, 2019). They believed that by making college free, public funding desensitized students to the true price of higher education and led them to treat the university with contempt. Friedman and Buchanan sought to prove that “free public goods such as education could act as a perverse incentive toward destructive anarchism and, conversely, how the pricing of these same goods could reverse such alarming trends” (Cooper, 2019, p. 218). Therefore, neoliberal economists suggested a new model of education funding – one that would replace public with private deficit spending and restore authority in society. With

the election of Ronald Reagan as president in 1980, his administration enacted significant budget cuts to education, following right in line with the neoliberal ideologies previously mentioned. Reagan and his administration viewed free college tuition as a burden on the taxpayer. In fact, the Secretary of Education at the time, Terrel Bell, was instructed to “pull those leeches off the backs of decent, hardworking people” when referring to students attending college who were not the taxpayers’ own children (Cooper, 2019, p. 240). The aim of this new model of education funding was two-fold: Cut budget deficits – which was one of Reagan’s main goals as president – and restore respect to authority figures – which placed responsibility back on parents and students in financing college costs (Cooper, 2019). Further education budget cuts occurred as well. By 1989, loans had officially replaced grants as the largest source of federal funding for student aid (Cooper, 2019).

The initial intention for the utilization of standardized tests in the college admissions process was to ensure a consistent measure of students’ scholastic aptitude (Alcocer, 2019). Since then, standardized tests for college admission have been altered and revamped many times to better reflect students’ scholastic achievement. Even more, higher education institutions themselves in recent years have altered the significance that standardized test scores play in the admission of their prospective students. Yet, the history of its creation and implementation over the course of nearly a century has evidently suggested ulterior motives for its purpose. Although higher education over the last century has become more accessible for students with varying identities and backgrounds, the SAT’s overall use across the nation continues to persist. For this reason, the use of standardized tests only continues to magnify the inequities within college admissions processes across the nation.

Relevant Factors from HESA Literature

In this section, I will outline the core concepts from higher education and student affairs literature that inform the thematic concern. These concepts derive from the notion of power and how it informs ideology at higher education institutions. After that, I address the notion of neoliberal ideologies and their effect on informing policies and procedures within higher education institutions, specifically those in relation to admissions.

Power, Ideology, and Neoliberalism

Power is the influence and control that various aspects of society have on its members. It is not a tangible thing, but a relation (Althusser, 1971). It is not solely utilized by the government, but instead found within and used throughout every level of society. Power, therefore, lies in the relations of people and institutions, and the many forces that shape those relations. It is of no surprise then that higher education admissions policies and procedures have and continue to be affected by the concept of power. Even more so, such admissions policies and procedures exert power over those who are predominately affected by them – students. This can best be seen through analyzing the various oppressive forces and ideologies that govern how higher education institutions are operated, including higher education admissions. But first, one must analyze the concept of ideology, since ideology often informs how power is transmitted and reinforced. According to Althusser, (1971) ideology is an imaginary, but omnipresent production of ideas, beliefs, and practices that are constructed for the purpose of governing or controlling parts of society, such as people. One dominant, yet oppressive, ideology that informs higher education policy and practice as it relates to admissions policies and procedures is neoliberalism.

In recent decades, neoliberalism has shaped higher education policies and procedures by shifting focus to capital investment, including humans themselves (Harvey, 2007). This belief – human capital theory – is a relevant concept in neoliberal ideology, particularly in relation to higher education. This theory is closely associated with economist Theodore Schultz, who in the late 1950s and 1960s, popularized the idea that:

spending on human services such as education should be considered an investment rather than an act of consumption – and therefore education itself should be considered a form of capital or interest-bearing asset. (Cooper, 2019, p. 219)

For this reason, it was the intention that such investment in one's self would stimulate the national economic growth as more people similarly invested themselves in higher education (Cooper, 2019). Neoliberal ideologies ascertain that higher education institutions have a commitment to build human capital. According to Harvey (2007), students are:

configured by market metrics of our time as self-investing human capital...how to self-invest in ways that contribute to its appreciation...not concerned with acquiring the knowledge and experience needed for intelligent democratic citizenship. (p. 177)

This contradicts the commonly held belief among many higher education and student affairs practitioners that the true purpose of higher education is to promote the well-rounded development of students in order for them to become more democratic citizens in society (Williamson et al., 1949). In fact, higher education institutions are more likely to emphasize the liberatory qualities of education and deemphasize the ideologies of the dominant class they reproduce.

Instead, neoliberal ideologies ascertain the notion that higher education's ultimate purpose is to prepare students to enter society's neoliberal economy. Therefore, neoliberal

ideologies govern traditional admissions procedures by deeming how higher education institutions should view students, as well as how students should view themselves; as human capital. Admissions procedures reproduce this ideology by forcing students to ‘brand’ themselves in a certain way and gain certain experiences in order to be best marketable to eventually enter society’s economy and be successful in that position. In the neoliberal ideology, the definition of successful is deemed by the dominant capitalist economy. Therefore, prospective students must market themselves in the admissions process in such a way as to convince institutions that they will be a good return on investment, that institutions made a good decision by admitting and taking the chance on them.

Traditional admissions requirements such as the submission of outstanding standardized test scores and high school grade point averages accentuate this ideology with the belief that colleges and students alike are deemed successful if they admit, perpetuate, and release students into the economy. In this belief, students are simply viewed as human capital by higher education institutions. The fact is, universities function in society like factories, producing the knowledgeable and those who are trained to perform well in our capitalist economy. Admissions policies perpetuate this dominant ideology because universities and students alike are in constant competition with one another. Therefore, institutions are forced to set high standards for the students they accept, standards which are particularly unobtainable for underrepresented students. Otherwise, institutions will not produce students at a high enough standard deemed necessary for our capitalistic society. Just as students select a higher education institution and choice of study for a high return on investment, institutions do the same to prospective students. Institutions, particularly those which are highly esteemed, are highly selective in order to maintain their status. This is why they enact highly competitive admission standards and

requirements to maintain that status quo. Those students who do get accepted to esteemed institutions often end up in highly competitive areas in the market, which again maintains the institution's high regard.

If neoliberal ideologies did not govern modern higher education institutions, admissions processes could look much different than they currently do. First and foremost, higher education might be free and easily accessible to any individual who is interested in the pursuit of knowledge and becoming a more democratic citizen. Prospective students could be the ones to decide how to market themselves for admission, focusing on their strengths and not what society has deemed to be most important, most predictive of success. To end on a question to consider: If higher education institutions claim to be first and foremost for students, why do students have such little power in the admissions process?

To end on an optimistic note, higher education institutions have the ability to do more than reproduce oppressive ideologies that limit access for students of various underrepresented groups. As Althusser (1970) noted, higher education institutions are “not only the stake, but also the site of class struggle” (p. 69). For this very reason, they arguably can be the best place in society for a revolution of ideas to occur. This can be done through identifying oppressive power structures and controlling forces within the institution and society itself, deeming them to be wrong, and taking up action on these forces. In other words, one must take up and take on dominant ideologies to undermine their balance in society. As higher education and student affairs practitioners, we must be aware of the various oppressive forces that are entwined in the work we do. Then, we must address them by enacting change. Furthermore, we must educate our students about these dominant ideologies so they can begin to make change alongside us and their peers (Backer, 2018). Finally, such ideologies can only be fought when one sees it, calls it

out, and brings it into question. From there, these oppressive forces can be eroded through reversing and redistributing power relations in society. This is where my intervention comes into play.

Current State of the Concern

With a clear understanding of the core concepts from higher education and student affairs literature that inform the thematic concern, in this next section I will address the current discourse surrounding this concern occurring both within literature as well as national news. Key discourse topics I will note include the inequity within standardized tests in higher education admissions and the ineffectiveness of standardized test scores in predicting student success. I will then offer insight on some alternative admissions policies being proposed in current literature. I will conclude this section by noting the effect of current news, such as the Operation Varsity Blues scandal and the COVID-19 pandemic, has caused on the use of standardized testing in the higher education admissions process.

Discourse in Literature

The broad scope of literature regarding this thematic concern is primarily centered around two key concepts. First, standardized test requirements in the higher education admissions process are inequitable for various groups of students and are also not accurate predictors of student success in higher education. Second, the broad scope of literature has suggested alternative admissions procedures to address the two issues of inequity and inaccuracy.

Inequitable Standardized Tests. Firstly, standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT in the higher education admissions process are inequitable for various groups of underrepresented students (Jump, 2019). Such groups include students of several minority groups, those from low socioeconomic statuses, first generation students, students with disabilities, and students for who

English is not their first language. Some critics of standardized tests in higher education admissions claim some of the tests' questions are developed in such a way as to cause cultural bias. In these instances, students from lower income households may have difficulty answering them correctly (Garfield, 2006). For example, some questions contain information only certain groups of students would be familiar with. Garfield (2006) included a commonly cited example of such cultural bias in their article, *The Cost of Good Intentions: Why the Supreme Court's Decision Upholding Affirmative Action Admission Programs Is Detrimental to the Cause*. The following is an analogy question from an early 1980's SAT exam:

RUNNER: MARATHON
 (A) envoy: embassy
 (B) martyr: massacre
 (C) oarsman: regatta
 (D) horse: stable⁴³

Garfield (2006) noted that “approximately 53% of whites chose C, the correct answer, but only 22% of African-Americans chose C. Critics of the test hypothesized that test takers from lower income households failed to properly answer the question because the word regatta was not in their vernacular” (p. 23). Although this question is from a few decades ago, it shows how easily test questions can be created that do not take into consideration the varying contexts that students across the United States come from. These contexts therefore affect how well students will do on such exams, which are significant indicators of whether a student will access higher education or not.

Jump (2019) also noted that standardized test scores are generally correlated with a student's socioeconomic status. This represents further evidence of how standardized testing in the college admissions process is inequitable. The reason is that there are significant inequalities associated with access to test preparation (Jump, 2019). Students from lower-income

communities often attend understaffed and underresourced schools that cannot provide the same quantity and quality of standardized test preparation as schools in higher-income areas (Jump, 2019). In addition, supplemental test preparation apart from what is being taught and given in high schools is often expensive and therefore inaccessible for many students from low socioeconomic statuses (Jump, 2019).

Park and Becks (2015) conducted a study to investigate the correlation between high school resources and students' participation in SAT prep, as well as the impact that SAT prep has on SAT scores. The findings suggested that the idea of cultural capital, both at the individual and organizational – high school – level, increases access to SAT prep resources (Park & Becks, 2015). Students who have more highly educated parents, parents who have high educational aspirations for their children, and have more financial resources are more likely to participate in more advanced forms of test prep (Park & Becks, 2015). Those students are also more likely to achieve higher scores on the SAT than their counterparts. The same outcomes are projected for students who attend larger high schools with higher rates of participation in AP courses (Park & Becks, 2015).

Jaschik (2019) provided additional compelling evidence that the use of standardized test scores in admissions is inequitable, particularly for students from lower socioeconomic statuses:

Across the United States, many high school students from high-income families have the resources to attend elite private schools, take personalized SAT/ACT prep courses, go on resume-boosting travel programs, embark on cross-country college tours to 'demonstrate interest', and employ professional college counselors to strengthen their application materials. Students from lower-income backgrounds often have no opportunity to engage in any of these activities. (n.p.)

These factors further challenge the fairness of standardized testing in the higher education admissions process. If test preparation can only be accessed by those with the necessary financial resources, this system is clearly inequitable. Jump (2019) posed one final remark relevant to this issue:

If a student's SAT and ACT scores can be improved significantly by test preparation, then aren't students able to pay hundreds or thousands of dollars for test preparation given an unfair advantage? Should two students with equal scores be treated similarly if one has received significant test prep and the other hasn't? (n.p.)

Inaccurate Predictors of Success. The second concept is that standardized test requirements in the higher education admissions process are not accurate predictors of success in higher education for all students. Traditional predictors of college persistence and academic success primarily focus on a student's high school grade point average and standardized test scores as means for establishing admissions eligibility. However, these predictors have been shown to account for only a small amount of variance (25%) of a student's persistence and success (Sparkman et al., 2012). Furthermore, critics in recent decades have exposed exams such as the SAT as weak predictors of student academic success in higher education, particularly for nontraditional students (Deil-Amen & LaShawn Tevis, 2010). In fact, findings from a study conducted by Hoffman and Lowitzki (2005) indicate that high school grades are stronger predictors of student success in higher education than standardized test scores, particularly for racial minority students.

Thus, scholars have called for an increased focus on nontraditional predictors of college persistence and academic success. This is necessary, as Sparkman et al. (2012) suggested, since student retention and academic performance may be related to other variables, or even a

combination of variables (Sparkman et al., 2012). Examples of other variables include, but are not limited to, extracurricular activities, employment history, letters of recommendation, and a student's socioeconomic background. Whereas standardized tests only measure a small segment of the skills and qualities that lead to success in higher education and life after graduation, these examples have the potential to show how several qualities of a student will contribute to their success. This, therefore, suggests that less emphasis should be placed on students' quantifiable aspects such as test scores and high school grades, and place more emphasis on the examples noted above when determining admission to college (Rubin & Canché, 2019). Other scholars are on the same page, such as Hoffman and Lowitzki (2005), who even took the suggestion to the next level by calling for the potential elimination of standardized test scores altogether.

Alternative Admissions Policies. Alternatively, others recommend simply modifying the requirement of standardized test scores in higher education admissions, such as enacting a test-optional policy (Furuta, 2017). The intended purpose of a test-optional policy in college admissions is to provide students the opportunity to decide whether or not to submit their standardized test scores. For students, this can be helpful for a variety of reasons. Students who do not believe their test scores reflect their scholastic achievement have the ability to decide whether to apply without submitting their scores, which would mean they would therefore not have to compete against students who did score well (Ake-Little, 2019). Students might also be more likely to apply to a higher education institution, particularly a more selective one, because they might have believed they would not have been otherwise accepted into the institution without such policy (Rubin & Canché, 2019). Furthermore, since test-optional policies allow students to place less emphasis on earning a particular score, this ultimately might significantly reduce the amount of stress that standardized testing causes students. On the institution's side,

Rubin and Canché (2019) noted that a test-optional policy will allow them to receive more applicants.

However, there are potential downsides to test-optional policies. Furuta (2017) posed that if test scores are no longer required, other forms of measurement will have to be used, such as various extracurricular activities and volunteer opportunities in which a student has participated. The issue is that not all students have the same access, time, or resources available to them to accomplish such measures (Ake-Little, 2019). Furuta (2017) suggested that this might only further the inequities among students trying to access higher education.

Over the past decade, higher education institutions across the nation have made the decision to switch to test-optional policies in regards to their standardized testing requirements (Jump, 2019). For the institutions who continue to require their prospective students to submit test scores, Jump (2019) noted that many do not place as great an emphasis on this requirement as they once did. To provide a national statistic of this change, by 2018, more than 1,000 higher education institutions were test-optional (Hossler et al., 2019). This statistic, as will be explained later, has only increased since then.

An additional consensus surrounding this topic is the shift in focus from traditional college admissions requirements, such as grade point averages and standardized test scores, to a more holistic and qualitative examination of students who are applying to higher education institutions. Besides the nontraditional variables previously noted, there is little research surrounding what additional nonacademic factors (NAFs) higher education institutions currently, or should, utilize in determining students' admissions. Yet, Hossler et al.'s (2019) study of currently used NAFs might provide useful examples to consider. The study found that the most commonly used NAFs were as follows in rank order: (1) Performance factors; (2) Attitudinal

factors; (3) Creativity; and (4) Grit (Hossler et al., 2019). Performance factors include levels of engagement/effort/motivation, discipline/professionalism, teamwork, leadership, and management/organization (Hossler et al., 2019). Attitudinal factors include self-concept, self-efficacy, interests, social attitudes/values/beliefs, ethics/morality, intercultural sensitivity, and adaptability/flexibility (Hossler et al., 2019).

Given that many of these factors seem rather difficult to measure, Hossler et al. (2019) noted that more research needs to be done in order to determine the best ways to assess these factors in their prospective students. However, one primary method for which higher education institutions can assess these factors is through the utilization of personal statements or essays. Including various prompts within them could provide greater insight into such factors a student possesses, and at what amount. Regardless of how NAFs are assessed, Deil-Amen and Tevis (2010) believed that by incorporating them within the college admissions process, access to higher education will increase, most notably for underrepresented students.

Discourse Outside of Literature

The debate over the use of standardized testing in the higher education admissions process is not new, yet recent events are creating new implications for this concern.

Operation Varsity Blues. A years-long conspiracy conducted to influence undergraduate admissions at several prominent American higher education institutions in the United States has shed recent light on the ways the college admissions process can be manipulated to benefit some students over others. This scandal was brought to light in the early months of 2019 when investigation of the conspiracy, code named Operation Varsity Blues, began. The indictments included charges of conspiracies related to various actions, including cheating on standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT (Jaschik, 2019). This was done in a variety of ways, on account

of prospective students' parents. According to the indictments, some of those involved in the conspiracy encouraged students to claim they had learning disabilities in order to be directed to specific testing centers that would accommodate them, such as providing them extra test-taking time (Jaschik, 2019). According to one defendant, those specific testing centers were ones that he could "control" (Jaschik, 2019). In other cases, those involved bribed SAT and ACT exam proctors, who would then take the test for the student, provide the student with the correct answers during the test, or correct the student's answers once the test was complete (Jaschik, 2019).

Operation Varsity Blues dramatically altered the way society perceived the fairness of higher education admissions in the United States. The scandal has shown that money has the ability to buy access into higher education and people with money are sometimes willing to do whatever it takes for their children to receive access. Regardless of whether the testing agencies behind the SAT and ACT believe such exams are equitable measures of student achievement for all students, scandals such as these indicate the ability for such admissions requirements to turn inequitable. For this reason, why do higher education institutions in the United States continue to utilize standardized test scores to determine students' acceptances into their institutions if they have shown so much abuse? To make a final remark on this current event, Cook (2019) provided a thought-provoking statement: "To say nothing of how easily the testing system has been hacked by those with the money and gall to do so—proves that our kids frankly deserve a change in how we assess their candidacy for admission" (p. 53).

COVID-19 Pandemic. Only one year after the Operation Varsity Blues scandal hit the headlines, another momentous event in history created new implications for the debate surrounding the use of standardized tests in the higher education admissions process. The

COVID-19 pandemic over the course of the past year has caused significant changes for higher education institutions, particularly in regards to their admissions procedures. Businesses across the nation limited their capacity, even shutting down temporarily or permanently in order to reduce the spread of the virus, testing centers included. This was true for many testing centers, as well as schools that were often utilized to administer SAT and ACT exams for local students (Jump, 2020). As a result, testing agencies have struggled to deliver their products to students, causing many students to have been unable to take the SAT and ACT for the purpose of submitting them in their applications to colleges and universities (Jump, 2020). Given this, many higher education institutions across the nation decided to alter their admissions policies for their Fall 2020 semesters. Many did this by going “test optional” for an articulated number of admission cycles. Others went a step further by declaring themselves “test blind” (Jump, 2020). One primary example of this modification in admissions processes is the University of California system. In May of 2020, UC’s Board of Regents suspended their standardized test requirement for all California first-year applicants until the Fall 2024 semester (UC Office of the President, 2020). Since then, UC has been working on creating a new test intended to better align with the content the University expects their students to have mastered in preparation for higher education at their institution (UC Office of the President, 2020). However, if the new test does not meet specified criteria for the Fall 2025 admission period, UC has made the decision to eliminate their standardized testing requirement for California students (UC Office of the President, 2020). These changes are aimed at increasing equity in California, and provide UC the opportunity to evaluate how such policy can affect student achievement and success in higher education (UC Office of the President, 2020). In response to this change, UC Board of Regents Chair John A. Pérez noted,

I think this is an incredible step in the right direction toward aligning our admissions policy with the broad-based values of the University...I see our role as fiduciaries and stewards of the public good and this proposal before us is an incredible step in the right direction. (UC Office of the President, 2020, n.p.)

In more recent news, new statistics from the Common Application has shed light on the impact test optional policies have had on the submission of standardized test scores for higher education institutions in the United States. February 15th of this year, only 44 percent of students who applied to higher education institutions through the Common Application submitted their SAT or ACT scores (Jaschik, 2021). This is a significant decline from the same date from last year, when the total was 77 percent (Jaschik, 2021). This is unsurprising, given the difficulties students have faced with registering to take the exams at testing centers. Additionally, this decline might be as a result of institutions temporarily, or even permanently, suspending their admissions' requirements of standardized test scores. Robert J. Massa, co-founder of Enrollment Intelligence Now, noted that the decrease might also be attributed to the fact that students see the test-optional movement as a "possible way into the best colleges" and higher education institutions have gone to great lengths to "convince their applicants that optional means optional and that non-submission would not hamper their chances of admission." (Jaschik, 2021, n.p.). Jaschik (2021) imagined the thoughts of students, thinking, 'what have I got to lose? My test scores would have excluded me last year, so I wouldn't have applied, but I'll give it a shot now since test scores are optional.'

Robert Schaeffer, Interim Executive Director of FairTest: National Center for Fair and Open Testing, and long-standing critic of standardized testing in college admissions, provides a thoughtful opinion regarding this change:

The bottom line is that going ACT/SAT optional is a win-win for both institutions and applicants. That is why so many schools that temporarily suspended testing requirements for fall 2021 have already extended that policy to fall 2022 and, frequently, beyond.

(Jaschik, 2021, n.p.)

This change has, and will continue to, cause higher education institutions to rely on other measures of student achievement and success when determining admission. Most prominent of alternative measures include high school courses and grades (Bruni, 2020). Bruni (2020) recalled his conversation with author, Jeffrey Selingo, where Selingo predicted other traditional admissions requirements might be things of the past as well, as a result of the pandemic. Selingo expects the disappearance of “application bloat”, the “flamboyant multiplicity of clubs, causes, hobbies, and other materials that applicants assemble and showcase” (Bruni, 2020, n.p.). The pandemic evidently put a hold on the vast majority of these “bloats”, and Selingo hopes higher education institutions and prospective students alike might realize their unimportance (Bruni, 2020).

In September of 2020, Jump (2020) posed an important question to consider: What happens once colleges and applicants experience a world without test scores? Although only half a year has passed since then, those six months might have provided enough insights to begin answering Jump’s question. As Bruni (2020) similarly predicted, “the SAT’s downgrade won’t be fleeting. I think it’s been knocked off the pedestal permanently” (n.p.).

Best Practices in the Field

Recent events such as Operation Varsity Blues and the COVID-19 pandemic have shown how easily those in power can alter higher education admissions procedures and how quickly the perception of the validity of such requirements can change. Consequently, this admissions

requirement continues to play a crucial role in today's society when determining who has greater, or less, access to higher education. In regards to best practices in the field of higher education and student affairs to address this concern, one principal point to acknowledge is that there is just simply not a one size fits all solution. Student body presidents from universities across the country wrote an op-ed for the Los Angeles Times in which they said,

[change] will only happen once the larger, deeply rooted institutional barriers to higher education are acknowledged and removed so that students, regardless of the status and wealth of their parents, have truly equitable opportunities for admission into the university of their choice. (Jaschik, 2019)

This is evidently a multifaceted task to accomplish, which is why Bruni (2020) suggested to begin addressing this concern by focusing on what matters. This can be done by incorporating test-optional policies and holistic review approaches to provide students the opportunity to be proud of what they submit upon applying to higher education, since dismantling inequities within secondary education institutions across the nation is especially not a simple task.

It is evident that the pandemic has more or less forced higher education institutions to reevaluate their admissions requirements. This has been done to ensure that students are evaluated fairly and accurately, since the pandemic has prevented many of them from being able to accomplish things they would have previously included in their applications. Scholars stress the importance of considering NAFs that students have significantly developed as a result of the pandemic (Pietrafetta, 2021). Chief among these factors is resilience, which can be helpful for students to possess while progressing through higher education and life beyond (Pietrafetta, 2021).

It is important to note, however, that if higher education institutions begin incorporating more NAFs into their admissions procedures, it is critical that they are transparent about utilizing these factors (Seltzer, 2019). Students, parents, admissions counselors, and the general public alike will demand a clearer understanding of what factors are being considered at the specific institutions in which they are interested (Hossler et al., 2019). Seltzer (2019) noted that increased transparency and visibility into the high-stakes process applying to higher education might be particularly helpful for first generation students, since those students are often most disadvantaged for not fully understanding the college admissions process.

Furthermore, it is also essential to highlight that preparation for applying to higher education, including enrollment in the best courses in high school and completion of the SAT and ACT, is set well before the traditional recruitment season begins. This further shows how crucial preparation for higher education during a student's secondary education is, yet this concern is difficult to address on a national level. Instead, higher education institutions should be dedicated to work more closely with high schools to provide greater support in guiding students through the admissions process (Deil-Amen & LaShawn Tevis, 2010).

Deil-Amen and LaShawn Tevis (2010) state that altering admissions procedures will not be enough to ensure equity among all students trying to access higher education. Although proponents of test-optional policies and holistic review approaches argue that they reduce the inequities created through admissions requirements, it is evident that standardized tests are only one of the many obstacles underrepresented students must navigate in order to access higher education. An institution's adoption of alternative admissions procedures simply cannot be the cure-all solution to reduce admission inequities among underrepresented students without considering other factors, such as academic preparation, geographic limitations, and financial

obstacles (Rubin & Canché, 2019). Rubin and Canché (2019) noted the real challenge in closing higher education gaps for underserved populations centers on ensuring that for those who are admitted, they have the means necessary to enroll, persist, and graduate. Therefore, strategic programs and services need to be in place in higher education institutions in order to ensure students' success throughout their college experience (Santos et al., 2010).

Chapter Four: Intervention Design

I concluded Chapter Three by noting several best practices in the field of higher education and student affairs about addressing the thematic concern of investigating the inequity and ineffectiveness of standardized testing in the higher education admissions process. With these best practices in mind, in Chapter Four, I will propose an intervention to address this concern. I will begin by introducing my proposed intervention, explaining why such an intervention can address the thematic concern, and noting the overall purpose, goals, objectives, and outcomes projected to occur as a result of the implementing the intervention. I will then provide a thorough description of each component of the intervention, including potential challenges I expect to occur in its implementation. Additionally, I will describe how the theories I discussed in Chapter Two and the literature I discussed in Chapter Three have helped inform the intervention. I will conclude the chapter by noting key ACPA/NASPA professional competencies that intersect with my thematic concern and proposed intervention.

Intervention Introduction

The research I have done surrounding the inequity and ineffectiveness of standardized testing in the higher education admissions process has led me to propose an intervention as a potential solution to this concern. To best address the issues of both equity and effectiveness, the intervention I propose is the creation of a holistic review method in the higher education admissions process. This holistic review method will be an alternative to an institution's traditional admissions approach, which primarily reviews students based on their high school grade point averages and standardized test scores. This holistic review method will be utilized for applicants who do not initially meet admission to the institution based on their standardized test scores. Instead, such applicants will then be reviewed on the basis of several non-academic

factors through their responses to a variety of essay prompts. Upon their admission, the students will be recommended campus resources to utilize in order to best succeed throughout their higher education experience. These recommendations will be identified by admissions officers through reviewing the students' essay responses.

In order to achieve its successful implementation, the intervention includes a training for admissions officers on this holistic review method. The training educates admissions officers on the benefits of utilizing a holistic review approach in the higher education admissions process for students, particularly those from underrepresented groups including several minority groups, those from low socioeconomic statuses, first generation students, students with disabilities, and students for who English is not their first language (Jump, 2019). The training provides admissions officers with the knowledge needed to incorporate a holistic review approach in the admissions process for students who do not meet the institution's standardized test score requirement to otherwise gain admission. Additionally, the training educates admissions officers on identifying the campus resources that will best support the student's needs during their higher education experience, based upon their essay responses.

Purpose

The purpose of this intervention is two-fold: (1) to increase higher education access to students who do not meet institutions' standardized test score requirements in the admissions process, and (2) to support students through their time in higher education by encouraging the utilization of personalized campus resources to best ensure a student's success. I believe this intervention is a potential solution to address the issues of both equity and effectiveness in relation to the requirement of standardized test scores in the higher education admissions process. This intervention not only increases higher education access to students who otherwise

would not have gained admission based on their standardized test scores, but it also encourages the utilization of resources that the student might need the most in order to ensure their success in higher education.

Goal, Objectives, and Outcomes

The goal of the intervention is to increase higher education access to students who do not meet traditional admissions requirements, such as minimum standardized test scores. In order to achieve this goal, I have outlined specific objectives and corresponding tasks for each component of the intervention. Additionally, I have outlined the outcomes that are projected to occur as a result of each of the components of the intervention:

Admissions Officers' Training:

- Objective 1: Educate admissions officers on the benefits of utilizing a holistic review approach in the higher education admissions process, particularly for underrepresented students
 - Task: Provide admissions officers a training on the purpose of a holistic review method
- Objective 2: Equip admissions officers with the knowledge needed to utilize a holistic review method in the admissions process
 - Task: Provide admissions officers a training on the holistic review method

As a result of attending the training, admissions officers will be able to:

- Outcome 1: Articulate the benefits of utilizing a holistic review method in the higher education admissions process, particularly for underrepresented students
- Outcome 2: Execute the holistic review approach in the admissions process for qualifying students

- Outcome 3: Identify the campus resources that best fit the supports each student's essay responses have suggested potentially needing to be most successful during their higher education experience
- Outcome 4: Report confidence in their ability to increase higher education access and equity for students applying to the higher education institution

Holistic Review Method:

- Objective 1: Create greater higher education access for students who otherwise would not have gained access due to their low standardized test score(s)
 - Task: Utilize a holistic review method in the higher education admissions process for students who do not meet the institution's admission requirement of minimum standardized test scores
- Objective 2: Create a holistic review method in the higher education admissions process for students who do not meet the institution's traditional admissions requirement of minimum standardized test scores
 - Task 1: Create the holistic review method's factors for determining admission
 - Task 2: Create the holistic review method's scoring rubric used for determining a student's admission
- Objective 3: Support students who are accepted to the higher education institution through the holistic review method
 - Task 1: Recommend campus resources for the student to utilize to be most successful in higher education
 - Task 2: Monitor the student's progress throughout their time in higher education through communication with the student's academic advisor, professors, and

directors of the offices for which the students have been recommended to utilize their resources

As a result of incorporating the holistic review method, students whose standardized test scores do not meet the higher education institution's minimum requirement for admission will:

- Outcome 1: Be provided with the resources they need to succeed in campus and academic environments
- Outcome 2: Be able to describe their personalized resource package of recommended supportive resources they should utilize to best succeed
- Outcome 3: Be able to associate the personalized supportive resources as an important element of their decision to retain in higher education

The tables on the next two pages provide an alternative method for viewing the objectives, tasks, and outcomes of each component of the intervention.

Admissions Officers' Training:

Objectives	Tasks	Outcomes As a result of the training, admissions officers will:
Objective 1: Educate admissions officers on the benefits of utilizing a holistic review approach in the higher education admissions process, particularly for underrepresented students	Task: Provide admissions officers a training on the purpose of a holistic review method	Outcome 1: Articulate the benefits of utilizing a holistic review method in the higher education admissions process, particularly for underrepresented students
Objective 2: Equip admissions officers with the knowledge needed to utilize a holistic review method in the admissions process	Task: Provide admissions officers a training on the holistic review method	<p>Outcome 2: Execute the holistic review approach in the admissions process for qualifying students</p> <p>Outcome 3: Identify the campus resources that best fit the supports each student's essay responses have suggested potentially needing to be most successful during their higher education experience</p> <p>Outcome 4: Report confidence in their ability to increase higher education access and equity for students applying to the higher education institution</p>

Holistic Review Method:

Objectives	Tasks	Outcomes Students will:
Objective 1: Create greater higher education access for students who otherwise would not have gained access due to their low standardized test score(s)	Task: Utilize a holistic review method in the higher education admissions process for students who do not meet the institution's admission requirement of minimum standardized test scores	Outcome 1: Be provided with the resources they need to succeed in campus and academic environments
Objective 2: Create a holistic review method in the higher education admissions process for students who do not meet the institution's traditional admissions requirement of minimum standardized test scores	Task 1: Create the holistic review method's factors for determining admission Task 2: Create the holistic review method's scoring rubric used for determining a student's admission	Outcome 2: Be able to describe their personalized resource package of recommended supportive resources they should utilize to best succeed
Objective 3: Support students who are accepted to the higher education institution through the holistic review method	Task 1: Recommend campus resources for the student to utilize to be most successful in higher education Task 2: Monitor the student's progress throughout their time in higher education	Outcome 3: Be able to associate the personalized supportive resources as an important element of their decision to retain in higher education

Theory to Practice

In this section, I revisit the theoretical frameworks and literature from higher education and student affairs literature discussed in previous chapters and provide insight on how they have helped inform the proposed intervention.

Theoretical Frameworks

The pillars within my philosophy of education, previously discussed in Chapter Two, have helped inform this intervention. First and foremost, my philosophy centers around my belief that higher education should be accessible to all who wish to pursue it in order to grow and develop as an individual. Two pillars of my philosophy of education have particularly informed the proposal of a holistic review method in the higher education admissions process for students who do not meet an institution's traditional admissions requirements.

The first noteworthy pillar in relation to informing the intervention is that higher education should encourage the pursuit of learning. Although higher education institutions serve to educate their students, it is my belief that they have the ability to do much more than simply educating. Higher education has the ability, and arguably the duty, to advance both the academic and personal growth of its students (Williamson et al., 1949). Higher education, therefore, is neither a beginning nor an end for a student, but acts as a milestone to symbolize one's desire to grow as an individual and lead a more significant life. This is similar to Freire's (1970) Ontological Vocation Theory, suggesting that humans have an innate desire to develop themselves into better, more civilized, humans. Higher education and student affairs practitioners have the key role of assisting in this holistic development, learning, and action of the students they serve. This can be best articulated in the founding document of the profession of student affairs, *The Student Personnel Point of View* (Williamson et al., 1949). The document noted that

educational institutions:

have the obligation to consider the student as a whole...His intellectual capacity and achievement, his emotional make up, his physical condition, his social relationships, his vocational aptitudes and skills, his moral and religious values, his economic resources, and his aesthetic appreciations. (p. 2)

This quote ties into the second noteworthy pillar in relation to informing this intervention; higher education institutions need to be aware of the individuality of their students. It is evident that individuals have differences in their backgrounds, such as socioeconomic status, race, and gender, as well as varying differences in abilities, interests, and goals. More than ever, “traditional” students at higher education institutions are no longer in the majority. Students seeking higher education degrees are more diverse and are from varying backgrounds than ever before in American history (Espinosa et al., 2019). For this reason, higher education and student affairs practitioners need to be cognizant of how these differences in identities might influence students’ educational and personal growth while pursuing higher education.

These two pillars of my philosophy of higher education clearly articulate how creating a holistic review method can be a necessary alternative in the admissions process for students who otherwise would not have been accepted based on an inequitable and ineffective admissions requirement. Given that higher education provides students much more than just a degree – such as opportunities for personal growth and development – why do institutions continue to put barriers in place that limit access for various groups of students? If institutions truly claim they develop the whole student, why do admissions policies use a student’s score on an exam as the principal factor for their acceptance into higher education? Furthermore, if institutions claim to value the individuality of students and the various factors or identities that make them who they

are, why do admissions policies not reflect that? This question further demonstrates the necessity of utilizing holistic review approaches in the higher education admissions process, as approaches such as these value the individuality of students. With this concept of individuality in mind, students will more likely be considered for admission with their best aspects and qualities, instead of a factor that might not truly reflect their academic abilities.

Relevant Literature

In addition to the frameworks within my philosophy of education, the literature previously discussed in Chapter Three has also helped inform the intervention. Several key factors from the literature have particularly informed the proposal of a holistic review method in the higher education admissions process for students who do not meet an institution's traditional admissions requirements.

Neoliberal ideologies govern traditional admissions procedures by deeming how higher education institutions should view students, as well as how students should view themselves; as human capital (Cooper, 2019). Admissions procedures reproduce this ideology by forcing students to 'brand' themselves in such a way as to convince institutions that they will be a good return on investment; that institutions made a good decision by admitting and taking the chance on them. Conversely, if neoliberal ideologies did not govern modern higher education, admissions processes could look much different than they currently do. For example, prospective students could be the ones to decide how to market themselves for admission, focusing on their strengths and not what society has deemed to be most important, most predictive of success. This is exactly what a holistic review method would promote.

Several pieces of literature had suggested the difficulty of addressing the issue of equity in the higher education admissions process. Student body presidents from universities across the

country provided a thoughtful consideration in relation to this concern in their Los Angeles Time op-ed:

[change] will only happen once the larger, deeply rooted institutional barriers to higher education are acknowledged and removed so that students, regardless of the status and wealth of their parents, have truly equitable opportunities for admission into the university of their choice. (Jaschik, 2019)

This concern is evidently a multifaceted task to accomplish, which is why Bruni (2020) suggested to begin addressing this concern by focusing on what matters. This can be done by incorporating test-optional policies and holistic review approaches to provide students the opportunity to be proud of what they submit upon applying to higher education, since dismantling inequities within secondary education institutions across the nation is especially not a simple task. Furthermore, recent events such as Operation Varsity Blues and the COVID-19 pandemic have shown how easily those in power can alter higher education admissions procedures and how quickly the perception of the validity of such requirements can change.

It is evident through the literature previously noted that addressing the issue of equity in the higher education admissions process is not a simple task. There are various deeply rooted societal and institutional ideologies that continue to limit higher education access to various groups of students. Yet, if we cannot completely eliminate these barriers (i.e. standardized testing requirements), it is my belief that an alternative admissions approach, such as the holistic review method within the intervention, proposes a loophole for such students to gain access to higher education and develop both personally and academically.

Intervention Proposal

In this section, I offer a detailed guide to executing each of the components that form the intervention: Creating a holistic review method, which includes identifying recommended campus resources, and creating an admissions officers' training on the holistic review method.

Holistic Review Method

Students who do not meet the higher education institution's minimum standardized test score admissions requirement will be then eligible to be reviewed in an additional method; the holistic review method. After reviewing the student's initial, traditional admissions application, admissions officers will request the student to submit additional material to be reviewed utilizing the holistic review method. Refer to Appendix A for a sample request for additional material. This additional material is the responses to a few prompts designed to assess a student on various non-academic factors. As an alternative to the higher education institution's traditional admissions review process, the holistic review method will assess students' eligibility based on several non-academic factors, rather than merely the academic factors of grade point average and standardized test scores that are traditionally used to determine admission. Based on the research I have done regarding non-academic predictors of student success in higher education, I have selected four non-academic factors that will be used to assess a student's eligibility using the holistic review method. The factors are as follows:

- The desire/passion to pursue higher education
- The ability to grow/develop
- The ability to think creatively
- The ability to balance one's various roles

These four non-academic factors will be assessed through the student's responses to a few prompts. The student will be provided the opportunity to respond to the prompts in ways to best showcase their attributes (i.e. written, orally through a video recording, or through the creation of a creative piece). The prompts have been thoughtfully constructed to provide insight into the level to which the student possesses these four non-academic factors. Refer to Appendix B for the list of prompts, along with the corresponding non-academic factor(s) associated with each prompt.

Admissions officers will review the student's responses to assess the level to which the student possesses the four non-academic factors. Admissions officers will also be reviewing academic factors from the student's original, traditional application in conjunction with the four non-academic factors to determine the student's eligibility for admission. Those academic factors include the student's high school grade point average, possible AP courses taken and the student's corresponding AP scores if applicable, and the rigor of the high school they attended. These academic factors from the student's original application will be reviewed for reference purposes only, and will not be scored to determine the student's admission.

Admissions officers will determine the student's eligibility for admission by utilizing a scoring rubric for the non-academic factors noted above. As previously mentioned, the student will be scored on these four non-academic factors based upon their responses to the prompts in the holistic review method. The scoring rubric provides 5 scoring levels for each factor. The levels are as follows: not at all demonstrated, slightly demonstrated, moderately demonstrated, considerably demonstrated, and demonstrated to a high degree. For scoring purposes, each level is assigned a number of points ranging from 0 to 4 (i.e. 0 points are given for not at all demonstrated, and 4 points are given for demonstrated to a high degree). To be eligible for

admission, the student must score an average of at least a 2.8 points for all four non-academic factors. Using an average of points instead of a total of points was decided to show acknowledgment that a student does not need to excel in all four factors to be eligible for admission to the institution. Instead, strengths in some areas can therefore compensate for weaknesses in other areas. Refer to Appendix C for an example of what the scoring rubric might look like.

Identifying Recommended Campus Resources. After the admissions officer determines the student's eligibility through the holistic review method, the admissions officer will identify supportive campus resources the student should utilize throughout their time in higher education. These resources will be recommended for each student based on the need their prompt responses in the holistic review method have potentially indicated. Such supportive resources are recommended to students being reviewed in the holistic review method to ensure the students are given the appropriate support needed for them to be most successful during their higher education journey and beyond. Students will be given this information within their acceptance letter. See Appendix D for a sample acceptance letter for students being admitted through a holistic review method.

Admissions Officers' Training

In order to achieve its successful implementation, the third component of the intervention includes a training for admissions officers on the holistic review method. The training begins with educating admissions officers on the benefits of utilizing a holistic review method in the higher education admissions process for students, particularly those from various underrepresented groups. The training then provides admissions officers with the knowledge needed to incorporate a holistic review method in the admissions process for students who do not

meet the institution's standardized test score requirement to otherwise gain admission. Such knowledge includes the justification for assessing students' admission using the four non-academic factors previously discussed as predictors of student success in higher education. Other related knowledge in the training includes how to identify the level in which each student possesses the four non-academic factors, as indicated in the student's prompt responses. Along with that, the training instructs admissions officers how to record that data on the rubric, which will then determine the student's eligibility for admission.

The training also includes a section on educating admissions officers on the various supportive resources for students to utilize at the institution. Having an awareness and clear understanding of what the resources can provide students, admissions officers will be able to recommend the correct resources for each student accepted to the institution through the utilization of the holistic review method.

The training then provides ample time for admissions officers to practice the knowledge they have just learned about the holistic review method. Admissions officers will be given sample admissions applications of students who did not meet the institution's minimum standardized test score requirement. The sample admissions application will already include the student's prompt responses. Admissions officers will then be instructed to utilize the holistic review scoring rubric to assess the student's eligibility, based on the four non-academic factors. If the student is eligible for admissions, the admissions officer will then identify campus resources the student's essay responses have potentially indicated they might benefit from throughout their time in higher education. Admissions officers will then practice drafting the student's acceptance letter, which includes the student's individualized recommended campus resources. See Appendix E for a sample training schedule.

Potential Challenges

In this section, I will propose the key challenges I anticipate one to need to overcome while implementing the intervention. When proposing an intervention as a potential solution to a problem, it is important to anticipate or recognize the various possible challenges that one might have to overcome. This is not only true for the actual implementation of the intervention, but also during the process of getting the intervention approved to be implemented. By being aware of the various challenges one might anticipate, higher education and student affairs practitioners can create specific, systematic strategies to overcome them to ensure the intervention creates positive change for those involved (Harrison, 2011).

I anticipate the primary challenge to enacting this intervention to be convincing stakeholders, such as a higher education institution's admissions department, that a holistic review method is necessary. Assessing students' eligibility for admission using standardized test scores are most likely a much more efficient method compared to the holistic review method I propose. For this reason, it is understandable to acknowledge that influencing this change or addition to an institution's admissions process might be a difficult task to accomplish. Therefore, it will be imperative to educate stakeholders on the benefits of utilizing holistic review methods for students, particularly those from various underrepresented groups.

Furthermore, the research I have done surrounding this concern suggests that a holistic review approach might be beneficial to use on all students, not just those whose standardized test scores do not fit a higher education institution's minimum requirement for admission. Such method allows students to choose what qualities or attributes of theirs will be used to determine admission to higher education, focusing on their strengths instead of their weaknesses. However, it is important to acknowledge that a holistic review method is more tedious than traditional

review methods. This suggests that convincing higher education institutions and their stakeholders on utilizing this alternative approach might be easier to accomplish if it is only utilized for students who would benefit most from being reviewed this way. This brings up an additional point to acknowledge: incorporating a holistic review method might be more manageable for higher education institutions with smaller application pools.

An additional challenge I anticipate to occur while proposing and enacting this intervention is ensuring its success. This shows the necessity of creating an appropriate method for evaluating the intervention. As evaluations are often the primary factors for which higher education institutions use to determine the success, implementation, and continuation of an initiative, I need to ensure the method for evaluating the success of the intervention is done so in a thorough and thoughtful manner. Refer to Chapter Five for the proposed method of assessing the success of the intervention.

Professional Competencies

In this section, I discuss two ACPA/NASPA professional competencies in particular that intersect with the thematic concern and proposed intervention. These two competencies are the Social Justice and Inclusion (SJI) competency and the Organizational and Human Resources (OHD) competency. These competencies hold great importance as they guide the student affairs professionals involved in the crafting of the program, creating a culture of inclusion and learning within the intervention's taskforce and programming.

The SJI competency is best described as "creating learning environments that foster equitable participation of all groups while seeking to address and acknowledge issues of oppression, privilege, and power" (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 30). One of the main reasons I sought to pursue a degree in higher education and student affairs was to use my knowledge and

experience to advocate for change that removes barriers to student success. The SJI competency reflects this by encouraging practitioners to “meet the needs of all groups, equitably distributing resources, raising social consciousness, and repairing past and current harms on campus communities” (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 30). Practitioners working to implement this intervention would grow in the SJI competency area by meeting the following intermediate outcomes: (1) Design programs that are inclusive and challenge current institutional, country, global, and sociopolitical systems of oppression, and (2) Advocate for the development of a more inclusive and socially conscious department, institution, and profession (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). Practitioners will meet these outcomes by educating admissions officers on the inequities associated with traditional admissions review methods and incorporating a holistic review method for students who have been historically denied access to higher education based on the lack of resources available to them in high school.

The OHD competency, particularly the Assessment, Advocacy, and Networking outcome, is the second competency that intersects with my thematic concern and proposed intervention. This outcome is best described as “knowing institutional policy and goals, professional networks, and their impact on goal achievement; and cultivating appropriate alliances and collaborate with others” (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 22). Given the nature of my intervention, practitioners cannot say their job creating higher education access to underrepresented students is done after students are accepted into the institution. Instead, various stakeholders across the institution must work together to ensure the students’ success after being given access to higher education. For this reason, practitioners working to implement this intervention would grow in the OHD competency area by meeting the following intermediate outcome: (1) Develop appropriate alliances with others to efficiently and effectively complete

work assignments. Practitioners will meet this outcome (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). Practitioners will meet this outcome specifically in the second component of the intervention: Identifying recommended campus resources. By establishing working relationships with various campus resources that will contribute to students' success in higher education, practitioners can better ensure the students accepted to the institution are not only being given access to higher education, but they are being supported throughout their collegiate experience to be most successful in higher education. It is evident that addressing inequity in higher education is not a simple task, but having various alliances across the institution dedicated to supporting underrepresented students might be a small, but impactful step in ensuring such students' success in higher education and beyond.

Chapter Five: Implementation and Assessment

In Chapter Four, I unfolded the proposal for an intervention to provide greater higher education access to students in the admissions process. I provided detailed explanation of the two main components of the intervention: the admissions officers' training and the holistic review method. In Chapter Five, I will provide a proposal for implementing the intervention, which includes outlining the proposed timeline, budget and funding, as well as key marketing strategies. Then, I will address the role of leadership within the intervention, including the two main leadership styles that have informed the intervention. Next, I will outline how one might assess the intervention. Finally, I will provide a few limitations to the intervention, as well as key points to keep in mind while looking ahead in terms of my thematic concern.

Intervention Implementation

In this section, I will provide key information needed to implement the proposed intervention. This information includes a proposed timeline for both components of the intervention, the intervention's budget and methods for funding the intervention, as well as potential marketing strategies. This section will conclude by addressing the role of leadership within the intervention, highlighting the two main leadership styles that have informed the intervention.

Timeline

Training Timeline. The timeline for the holistic review method training for the admissions team starts in June with research and then meeting with several third party providers to determine who will be hired to serve as the facilitators for the training. The meetings will include discussions surrounding training components and pricing. Third party provider options will be evaluated and one will be selected to facilitate the training by the end of August. The

admissions team will then be notified at the beginning of September of the training to occur. The training will occur in mid-January, before the spring semester begins. This will provide ample time for the admissions team to understand the holistic review method in preparation to begin using it by the upcoming fall semester. The admissions team will be sent an assessment survey of the training the day following the training.

Holistic Review Method Timeline. In regards to the timeline for the holistic review method, the timeline will vary for each student based on when they apply, but will follow the same progression regardless of when the student applies. Beginning as early as September 1, students will begin applying for admission. If a student does not meet the institution's minimum standardized test score admission requirement, the student qualifies to be reviewed through the holistic review method. The admissions officer assigned to the student will request, via email, for the student to submit three holistic review prompt responses as additional information for the admissions team to utilize in determining the student's admission. The student will be given a deadline of two weeks to submit their holistic review prompt responses. The admissions officer will then review the student's responses, as well as some components the student submitted in their initial admissions application, and utilize the scoring rubric to determine the student's eligibility for admission. If eligible, the admissions officer will then identify campus resources that the student's prompt responses have suggested might help the student be most successful during their time in higher education. The admissions officer will then compile the student's acceptance letter, including the personalized, recommended campus resources. The admissions officer will then mail out the student's acceptance letter.

Budget, Funding, and Marketing

Budget. The following chart provides an overview of the budget needed to implement the intervention. Each expense item noted within the chart includes a reasoning, or justification, for needing the item for the successful implementation of the intervention.

Expense Item	Reasoning	Cost
Scholarships	A scholarship for each student in the assessment cohort will better help ensure their success (retention) throughout their time in higher education	25 students, \$4,000 per student (\$500 per semester) Total - \$100,000
Acceptance Letters	Students will appreciate being mailed physical copies of their acceptance letters to commemorate their acceptance.	Cardstock (\$15 for 50) Envelopes (\$10 for 50) Postage (\$75) Total - \$100
Training Costs:		
Facilitators (2)	To best educate the admissions team on this subject, it should be from facilitators who are knowledgeable on this subject and are familiar with training others on this subject. This includes their transportation to and from the institution and their lodging for one night	\$20,000
Refreshments	Training sessions for an extended period of time need to offer food to keep participants (approx. 15) and facilitators (2) engaged	\$7 per person for breakfast, \$10 for lunch, \$5 for mid-afternoon snack Total - \$374
Training materials and manuals	Admissions team and facilitators will need materials to utilize during the training and a manual for each admissions officer to reference in the future	Materials and manuals for approx. 20 people (extras just in case) Total - \$200
		TOTAL EXPENSES - \$120,674

Funding and Marketing. Funding for the proposed intervention would primarily come from the higher education institution's admissions department. As a large portion of the intervention's budget is allocated for the admissions officers' training, the admissions department would be responsible for the funding of that component. Training is an essential component to the professional growth and development of administrators, as well as ensuring staff and the department as a whole stay up to date on new skills and advanced methods of the functional area for which they work. For these reasons, departments often allocate a portion of their budget for training opportunities. An additional method for funding my proposed intervention, particularly the admissions officers' training costs, could be from a grant, if available at the time of planning the training. The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) offers special project grants through their Imagine Grant program (Special Project Grant Guidelines, 2021). Special project grants awarded through NACAC's Imagine Grant program provide financial support for projects that serve students or the college admission profession. Special projects may include, but are not limited to, launching an advocacy program, or hosting a professional development workshop (Special Project Grant Guidelines, 2021). Based on these guidelines, the higher education institution's admissions department could apply for this grant in order to fund the admissions officers' training component of the intervention.

Another large portion of my proposed intervention's budget is the scholarships for the assessment cohort of 25 students. A unique strategy for funding these scholarships would be through the use of fundraising. Alumni of the higher education institution are often interested in giving back to the campus community and current students. For this reason, alumni could become donors of the intervention by sponsoring one of the 25 students. Alumni donors would provide \$500 each semester to their sponsor student, for a total contribution of \$4,000.

To ensure its successful implementation, there are two main marketing strategies needed to occur for the proposed intervention. First, as noted above, one way to fund the scholarships for the cohort of 25 students could be to ask alumni of the institution to become sponsors for each student. To enact this, letters would need to be written and sent out to potential alumni to serve as donors for each of the students within the assessment cohort. See Appendix F for a sample donor letter to alumni.

A second marketing strategy for the proposed intervention would be to create and send out a memo to various stakeholders at the higher education institution of the plan to review the progress of the cohort of 25 students who were admitted through the holistic review method. Such stakeholders can include the department chairs of the students' academic departments and the students' academic advisors. This marketing strategy can better ensure those involved in the students' successes are aware of the ways in which the students are being reviewed throughout their time in higher education. This can better ensure the students are being provided the necessary support to succeed and persist in higher education. See Appendix G for a sample memo to stakeholders.

Role of Leadership

As I previously noted in Chapter Four, there are significant challenges one might have to overcome to enact the proposed intervention. I believe these challenges primarily center around convincing higher education institutions and those involved in to accept this intervention, as it proposes an alternative method for reviewing students for admission to the institution. This key challenge articulates how important it will be to have a leadership plan to implement this intervention.

Elements of Leadership. Leadership is an essential quality for professionals in the field of higher education and student affairs, particularly for those who are committed to serving students and enhancing their development and success. As Astin and Astin (2000) noted, “Leadership is a process that is ultimately concerned with fostering change... a process where there is movement – from wherever we are now to some future place or condition that is different” (p. 8). Therefore, leadership is a purposeful, values-based, collaborative process that results in positive social change at various levels in society (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996). With this definition of leadership in mind, it is no wonder how important leadership is in relation to the proposed intervention. The intervention calls for a change, or an alternative, to the way in which something is currently done in order to provide greater access and support for students in higher education.

Leadership Styles. Several leadership styles have helped inform me and ultimately the strategies within the intervention; the two most significant are servant leadership and transformational leadership.

Servant Leadership. Martin et al. (2019) noted the fundamental concept regarding servant leadership is the idea that one’s influence as a leader is connected to one’s willingness to serve others and a genuine motivation to help others. With its core values of those who practice servant leadership being empathy, integrity, and sacrifice (Thompson, 2014), I believe I share these core values. The fundamental concept of servant leadership is the very reason why I initially, and continue to, seek a degree in higher education policy and student affairs. It is for this reason that servant leadership has helped inform and shape my leadership skills by emphasizing the importance of truly serving the students one works with by being the advocate and support system for them to ensure their development and success in higher education.

Transformational Leadership. A second leadership style that has helped inform and shape me is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership consists of two primary tenants: (1) change is the central purpose of leadership and (2) leadership transcends one's position in an organizational hierarchy (Northouse, 2004). A transformational leader is attentive to the needs and motives of followers and tries to help followers reach their fullest potential (Northouse, 2004). Therefore, it is the process whereby an individual engages with others and creates a connection that causes positive change on various levels. As an aspiring higher education and student affairs practitioner, transformational leadership resonates with me because it emphasizes enacting positive change on various levels, both for individual students and the campus community as a whole. I am committed to providing students the support and access to resources needed for them to succeed in higher education.

The two leadership styles noted above have helped inform my thematic concern and proposed intervention in several ways. Being informed by the servant leadership style allows me to recognize the importance of truly serving the students one works with and involving them and other relevant stakeholders in the collaborative process of change. Being informed by the transformational leadership style has instilled in me the importance of change and therefore the importance of student affairs practitioners to be committed to change in order to promote and enhance student development and success.

Leadership in my Intervention. As previously mentioned, effective leadership is a purposeful, values-based, collaborative process that results in positive social change at various levels in society. These characteristics are directly woven throughout my proposed intervention. First, the intention of the holistic review method is to create positive change by increasing higher education access to students who otherwise would not have been admitted based on their

standardized test scores. This alternative admissions method will not only promote positive social change for such individual students, but potentially for the local community by providing increased opportunities for various groups of people who otherwise would not have had the chance to attend higher education.

Furthermore, as I previously discussed in Chapter Four regarding potential challenges, another significant factor for the importance of leadership to occur in the intervention is leading others to understand the overall purpose of the intervention in providing greater higher education access to students, particularly those from underrepresented groups. By encouraging stakeholders to get on board with enacting this intervention, the stakeholders and institution alike will be able to make transformative, positive change for the institution itself, as well as the surrounding community. By advocating for the increased access for students as a result of this intervention, further positive change might then be able to occur in regards to increasing the support for students throughout their journey in higher education.

The method for which I will assess the intervention is also significantly informed by these effective leadership characteristics. As I will explain in greater detail in the next section, the proposed intervention will be assessed by randomly selecting 25 students who were admitted to the higher education institution through the holistic review method and tracking their progress, or success, throughout their time in higher education. The intention behind this assessment method is to emphasize the students' thoughts regarding whether this alternative admissions method has benefitted them in various aspects throughout their time in higher education, rather than simply focusing on data such as the students' semester grade point averages and their utilization of recommended supportive campus resources. This, therefore places a greater emphasis on collaborating with the students being assessed by seeking insight from them on how

successful the holistic review method was for them personally.

Intervention Assessment

Assessment plays a key role in the successful development of an intervention. Assessment is critical to an intervention's success as it is the best way to determine if the intervention's stated goals and objectives have been met. Most importantly, however, assessment provides opportunity for the intervention's continuous improvement. This continuous improvement is especially important because it helps address the ever-changing environments and populations often found in higher education institutions. Furthermore, assessment helps to ensure the most essential factor of interventions within higher education and student affairs; to provide the best experiences possible for the students one serves.

The assessment of the intervention that I propose will come in two forms: assessment of the admissions officers' training and assessment of the holistic review method.

Admissions Officers' Training

The assessment of admissions officers' training component will include two components. First, the admissions officers will submit their sample holistic review method admissions application that they practiced completing at the end of the training. Second, the admissions officers will submit a post-survey for the holistic review method training for admissions officers. The purpose of the post-survey is to gain a better understanding if the training accomplished the objectives and outcomes noted in Chapter Four. As a reminder, these objectives included educating admissions officers on the benefits of utilizing a holistic review approach in the higher education admissions process, particularly for underrepresented students, and equipping admissions officers with the knowledge needed to utilize a holistic review method in the admissions process. One of the significant outcomes I anticipated was that the admissions

officers would report confidence in their ability to increase higher education access and equity for students applying to the higher education institution. See Appendix H for a sample post-survey of the holistic review method training for admissions officers, which was created using Qualtrics (2021), a software to enable its use as an online instrument.

Holistic Review Method

The assessment of the holistic review method component of the proposed intervention will occur by following a randomly selected cohort of 25 students who had been reviewed for admission utilizing the holistic review method to assess their success throughout their higher education journey. The students will first be provided a survey upon their admittance to assess the short-term effectiveness of utilizing the holistic review method for students who do not meet the institution's minimum standardized test score admissions requirement. See Appendix I for a sample holistic review method student survey, which was created using Qualtrics (2021). To assess the long-term effectiveness of the holistic review method, the students will meet with their admissions officer for a check-in at the end of each semester. See Appendix J for example prompts for the end of semester check-ins. The check-ins will provide the student opportunities to meet with their admissions officer to discuss how their semester went, including both their successes and challenges. The check-in will be semi-structured so that the admissions officer is given prompts to guide the conversation, but the conversation may sway from the prompts to allow the student to discuss topics that would be most helpful for them. The check-ins will occur at least throughout the student's first year, but can continue for later years if the student wishes. The intention behind these check-ins is to provide students the individualized attention by university staff, showing the student that there are specific people who are invested in their success in higher education. When each check-in concludes, the admissions officer will complete

a progress report for the student to provide record of how the check-in went and what progress the admissions officer believes the student has made through communicating during the check-in. See Appendix K for a sample of the progress report from the admissions officer check-in, which was created using Qualtrics (2021).

In addition to the check-ins with admissions officers, the student's academic advisor will submit progress reports of the student, based on the meetings they have with the student throughout each semester. These progress reports by the student's academic advisor will include reports of the students' semesterly grade point averages, record of their utilization of recommended campus resources, among other factors. See Appendix L for a sample of the progress report by the student's academic advisor. These progress reports by the students' academic advisors will only be required through the students' first years at the higher education institution.

Limitations and Looking Ahead

As I begin to conclude my thesis, I believe it is important to include a few limitations that might be associated with my proposed intervention and its accompanying assessment. By understanding what I was not able to fully address, those who might implement this intervention will have a better understanding of where this intervention might be able to go in terms of providing greater access to students, as well as providing better support for students once they are admitted.

Throughout my research, I became more and more aware of the great complexities surrounding my thematic concern. In particular, it was the vast inequities occurring within the United States education system as it relates to preparing students to be most successful in the higher education admissions process that resonated with me the most. I chose to pursue a degree

in higher education and student affairs to provide students the support needed to help them reach their full potential and develop both personally and professionally. The more research I did, the more I realized the significant systemic hurdles that exist for students to access higher education. For this reason, there were so many more interventions that could have been proposed to provide more access and support for students who might not have had the same resources in high school as others to be best prepared for the higher education admissions process.

This awareness leads me to addressing the main limitation to my proposed intervention: providing higher education access might not be enough for students. Given the nature of this thesis, I was not able to address this issue as much as I hoped I would. However, I believe this provides me, as well as others who are passionate about this concern, a future goal that could be addressed concurrently with my proposed intervention of creating the holistic review method for students who do not meet an institution's traditional admissions requirements. For example, after assessing the first admissions season of utilizing the holistic review method, as well as following the cohort of 25 students through a few semesters of their collegiate journey, one might find that the results suggest that such students might need more support than first anticipated. Perhaps tying the holistic review method with a specific support program where students would be provided mentorship throughout their time in higher education might better ensure their success.

Looking ahead, if a higher education institution has found that the holistic review method has worked well for students who did not meet their minimum standardized test score admissions requirement, perhaps this method can be expanded for all students applying to the institution. Students should be proud of their personal and academic accomplishments they submit as part of their application process. If we as higher education and student affairs practitioners are committed to developing the whole student, it is imperative that we review the whole student and

all of their great strengths and resiliencies in the higher education admissions process. It is only then that we truly create access for students in higher education.

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Appendix A

Request for Additional Material

Dear [student name],

My name is [admission officer name] and I am an admissions officer at [institution name]. I would like to thank you for applying to [institution name] for a spot in the class of 2026. After reviewing your initial application, your SAT/ACT score did not meet our requirement for immediate acceptance, yet we see strong potential for success in you. Therefore, we are very interested in getting a better idea of what makes you unique and why you wish to pursue a degree in higher education.

Through an alternative admissions initiative known as the Holistic Review Method, please respond to three of the prompts below. You may respond to them in the following ways to best showcase your abilities: written, orally (through a video recording), or through the creation of a creative piece (drawing, painting, song, poem, etc.). We ask that at least one of the three responses be in traditional text format.

List of Prompts:

1. Describe a facet of your identity, background, or story that is essential to who you are.
2. What is one thing you want to accomplish by obtaining a degree in higher education?
3. Describe a personal accomplishment that is unrelated to academics, but means a lot to you.
4. Describe a time that you had to be brave or stand up for what you believe in.
5. Describe a time that you failed at something. How did that failure affect you?

We are confident in your candidacy. With that being said, we very much look forward to getting a better idea of what makes you unique and why you wish to pursue a degree in higher education! Please do not hesitate to reach out to me at [email address] if you have any questions regarding this request for additional information or the prompts themselves.

Sincerely,

[name]

Admissions Officer, [institution name]

[email address]

Appendix B

Holistic Review Method Prompts

1. Describe a facet of your identity, background, or story that is essential to who you are.
 - The ability to balance one's various roles
 - Desire/Passion to pursue higher education
2. What is one thing you want to accomplish by obtaining a degree in higher education?
 - Desire/Passion to pursue higher education
 - Ability to grow/develop
3. Describe a personal accomplishment that is unrelated to academics, but means a lot to you.
 - The ability to balance one's various roles
 - Desire/Passion to pursue higher education
 - Ability to think creatively
 - Ability to grow/develop
4. Describe a time that you had to be brave or stand up for what you believe in.
 - Desire/Passion to pursue higher education
 - Ability to grow/develop
 - Ability to think creatively
5. Describe a time that you failed at something. How did that failure affect you?
 - Ability to grow/develop
 - Ability to think creatively

Appendix C

Holistic Review Method Scoring Rubric

Academic Factor	Well below average	Below average	Low average	Average	High average	Above average	Well above average
High School GPA							
AP Courses/ Scores							
High School Rigor							

Non-Academic Factor	Not at all demonstrated (0)	Slightly demonstrated (1)	Moderately Demonstrated (2)	Considerably demonstrated (3)	Demonstrated to a high degree (4)
Desire/ Passion					
Ability to Grow/ Develop					
Balance Various Roles					
Ability to Think Creatively					

Score (points average): _____

Comments:

Appendix D

Acceptance Letter

[Institution's Logo/Emblem]

November 10, 2022

Dear [Student's First Name],

Congratulations! It is with great pleasure that I offer you admission to [Institution Name] for Fall 2022.

Your thoughtful application and remarkable accomplishments convinced us that you have the ability and motivation to succeed throughout your journey in higher education. We were particularly moved by your statements of passion to pursue higher education within your holistic review essay prompts.

We believe the personalized educational experiences we strive to provide allows our students to thrive both on-campus and in their personal and professional lives. For this reason, your application has indicated the utilization of the following campus resources throughout your time here will be most helpful for you to succeed.

- **Tutoring Services (Subject: Math)** - Math is a concern for many students and you might exceptionally benefit by early engagement with the free math tutoring services at the university's Learning Assistance & Resource Center.
- **Success Coaching** – Success Coaching provides individualized support to guide students toward academic and personal success at the university. Unlike tutoring, which fosters content knowledge, success coaching provides practical skills and strategies for students to achieve their academic goals.
- **Join a Student Club/Organization** – Joining a club or organization at the university provides countless opportunities for students such as personal and leadership growth and development, as well as a connection with like-minded peers. Check out the university's Student Leadership & Involvement office for a list of all our student clubs and organizations!
- **Participate in our First-Generation events** - Meet other first-generation students at the university, improve your skills to become a more successful student, and connect yourself and your family to the campus community!

Additionally, we have enclosed a starter package with this letter for you to begin familiarizing yourself with the campus and the opportunities we offer. Feel free to reach out to us at any time, as we would like to make your transition as easy as possible.

Once again, I extend my congratulations on your admission and welcome you to the [Institution Name] community. Sincerely,

[Signature]

[First and Last Name], Director of Admissions

Appendix E

Holistic Review Method Training Schedule

Time	Content
8:15 am – 9:00 am	Breakfast, Welcome, and Introductions
9:00 am – 9:15 am	Training Overview
9:15 am - 10:00 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an overview of the training content and schedule
10:00 am – 10:45 am	Holistic Review Method Purpose
10:00 am – 10:45 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the purpose of using a holistic review method in the admissions process • Discuss benefits to increase access and equity
10:45 am – 11:45 am	Who Most Benefits from a Holistic Review Method?
10:45 am – 11:45 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the types of students who benefit most from this method
11:45 am – 12:15 pm	Holistic Review Method Components (non-academic factors)
11:45 am – 12:15 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe what non-academic factors are • The benefits of using them (focusing on students' strengths)
12:15 pm – 1:00 pm	Lunch Break
1:00 pm – 1:30 pm	Utilizing the Holistic Review Scoring Rubric
1:00 pm – 1:30 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show how to use the scoring rubric
1:30 pm – 2:15 pm	Supportive Resources at the Institution
1:30 pm – 2:15 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate/refresh team on the various supportive resources available to help students at the institution
2:15 pm – 2:45 pm	How to Identify Supportive Resources Based on a Student's Holistic Review Prompt Responses
2:15 pm – 2:45 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate team on how to identify needs of students through analyzing their holistic review prompt responses • Educate team on how to link student's needs to supportive resources at the institution
2:45 pm – 4:15 pm	Snack Break
2:45 pm – 4:15 pm	Practice Time: Step by Step Practice on How to Use the Holistic Review Method
2:45 pm – 4:15 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team will practice utilizing the holistic review method with a sample student application
4:15 pm – 4:45 pm	Training Wrap Up, Next Steps
4:15 pm – 4:45 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recap what we learned • Provide next steps for incorporating the holistic review method

Appendix F

Alumni Donor Request Letter

Dear [Alumni's Name],

My name is [First and Last Name] and I am the Director of Undergraduate Admissions at [Institution Name]. During my time here, I have met incredibly dedicated volunteers and supporters like you. I truly share the dedication and enthusiasm of ensuring bright minds can fulfill their dreams of attending and succeeding at [Institution Name].

I am writing to you today to share insight on a new initiative that we are in the process of enacting. The initiative, the Holistic Review Method, was created to increase higher education access to students who might not have had access based on their standardized test scores not meeting the institution's minimum requirement for admission. As you may already know, vast inequities of standardized test preparation among high schools across the nation are often the main contributors of this issue of access for students. Therefore, this new initiative is providing such students an alternative method for determining their admission, focusing on non-academic factors such as the passion to pursue higher education, the ability to grow and develop, and the ability to think creatively, among others. But providing these students access is not the end goal. We wish to review 25 students who are admitted this way, and provide them the support needed for them to succeed throughout their time in higher education.

We hope you can help make this vision a reality. We would like you to consider funding a scholarship for one of the 25 students; providing a student a scholarship of \$500 each semester, for a total contribution of \$4,000. This scholarship will provide the student the financial support needed for them to succeed throughout their collegiate journey. As finances are often what prohibits students from retaining in higher education, even a small scholarship would assist a student financially and show them that others believe in their success.

If you are interested in making the difference in the life of a student at [Institution Name], please contact me at [phone number] or [email address]. I would love to provide you with more insight on the initiative, and information about the student you will be supporting throughout their entire college experience.

Warmest regards,

[signature]

[Name]

Director, Undergraduate Admissions

Appendix G

Memo to Stakeholders: Holistic Review Method Assessment Cohort

Dear Department Chairs and Academic Advisors,

My name is [First and Last Name] and I am the Director of Undergraduate Admissions at [Institution Name]. I am writing to you today to share insight on a new initiative that we are in the process of enacting. The initiative, the Holistic Review Method, was created to increase higher education access to students who might not have had access based on their standardized test scores not meeting the institution's minimum requirement for admission. As you may already know, vast inequities of standardized test preparation among high schools across the nation are often the main contributors of this issue of access for students. Therefore, this new initiative is providing such students an alternative method for determining their admission, focusing on non-academic factors such as the passion to pursue higher education, the ability to grow and develop, and the ability to think creatively, among others. But providing these students access is not the end goal. We wish to review a randomly-selected cohort of 25 students who are admitted this way, and provide them the support needed for them to succeed throughout their time in higher education.

You are receiving this letter because your academic department, or group of student advisees, contains at least one of these 25 students. We hope you can help us make this vision a reality. This can be accomplished during your normally-scheduled meetings with your student advisees within your academic department. To do so, we will ask you to submit brief progress reports of the student in order for us to assess their progress over time. At the end of each semester, you will receive instructions for submitting these progress reports.

In addition to the progress reports we ask from you, students within the Holistic Review Method assessment cohort have been provided a list of personalized support resources recommended for them to utilize to best succeed at [Institution Name].

To view which students within your academic department, or group of student advisees, is within the Holistic Review Method assessment cohort, please log in to the Academic Student Portal. Such students will have the following code next to their name: HRM.

We thank you in advance for providing these students the support needed to succeed throughout their time at [Institution Name]. Should you have any questions regarding the Holistic Review Method initiative or the Holistic Review Method assessment cohort, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[First and Last Name]

Director, Undergraduate Admissions

Appendix H

Admissions Officers' Training Post-Survey

On a scale from 0-10, I understand the benefits of utilizing the holistic review method for students in the higher education admissions process.

Completely disagree				Neutral				Completely agree		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

On a scale from 0-10, I understand the benefits of utilizing the holistic review method for students in the higher education admissions process, *particularly* for underrepresented students.

Completely disagree				Neutral				Completely agree		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

On a scale from 0-10, I understand the components of the holistic review method.

Completely disagree				Neutral				Completely agree		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

On a scale from 0-10, I have a better understanding of the supportive resources available for students at the higher education institution.

Completely disagree				Neutral				Completely agree		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

On a scale from 0-10, I feel confident in executing the holistic review method for qualifying students.

Completely disagree				Neutral				Completely agree		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

On a scale from 0-10, I feel confident in my ability to increase higher education access and equity for students in the admissions process.

Completely disagree				Neutral				Completely agree		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

Please provide any additional comments on your experience of the holistic review method training for admissions officers.

Appendix I

Holistic Review Method Student Survey

On a scale from 0-10, rate your experience submitting the Holistic Review Method prompt responses in the admissions process at [institution name].

Poor						Neutral					Excellent
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
<input type="radio"/>											

On a scale from 0-10, I appreciated the flexibility the Holistic Review Method prompt response options (written, video, creative piece, etc.) provided me.

Completely disagree						Neutral					Completely agree
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
<input type="radio"/>											

On a scale from 0-10, my prompt responses reflect my personal successes.

Completely disagree						Neutral					Completely agree
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
<input type="radio"/>											

On a scale from 0-10, my prompt responses better reflect my personal successes compared to academic factors such as my SAT/ACT scores.

Completely disagree						Neutral					Completely agree
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
<input type="radio"/>											

On a scale from 0-10, I found the suggested resources on my acceptance letter helpful.

Completely disagree						Neutral					Completely agree
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
<input type="radio"/>											

On a scale from 0-10, I feel confident in my ability to succeed in higher education.

Completely disagree						Neutral					Completely agree
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
<input type="radio"/>											

Please provide any additional feedback you might have regarding your experience submitting Holistic Review Method prompt responses in the admissions process at [institution name].

Appendix J

Check-in with Admissions Officer Prompts

- How did this semester go for you?
 - What successes/challenges did you have?
- Who are your support systems while at college? (parents, guardians, peers, professors, etc.)
- How have you gotten involved on campus? (clubs/orgs, volunteering, jobs)
 - If so, how has it helped you? If not, are there some you have in mind for next semester?
- Did you use the recommended resources this past semester?
 - If so, did you find them helpful? If not, why?
- What other resources on campus have you used other than the recommended ones?
- What goals you have for yourself next semester?
- What concerns do you have for next semester?
- What do you need to be most successful next semester?

Appendix K

Student Progress Report: Check-in with Admissions Officer

On a scale from 0-10, what is your impression of the student's overall progress this semester?

Poor					Average					Excellent
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

Please comment on the rationale behind this rating.

On a scale from 0-10, the student has benefitted from the utilization of supportive resources on campus this semester.

Completely disagree					Neutral					Completely agree
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

Please comment on the rationale behind this rating.

What recommendations do you have for facilitating the student's continuing success?

Appendix L

Progress Report by Academic Advisor

What is the student's semesterly GPA this semester?

What is the student's cumulative GPA this semester?

On a scale from 0-10, the student has made progress this semester in terms of academics.

Completely disagree					Neutral					Completely agree
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

Please comment on the rationale behind this rating.

On a scale from 0-10, the student has made progress this semester in terms of personal growth/development.

Completely disagree					Neutral					Completely agree
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

Please comment on the rationale behind this rating.

On a scale from 0-10, the student has made progress this semester in terms of professional growth/development.

Completely disagree					Neutral					Completely agree
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

Please comment on the rationale behind this rating.

On a scale from 0-10, the student has benefitted from the utilization of supportive resources on campus this semester.

Completely disagree					Neutral					Completely agree
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

What evidence have you observed that the student is benefitting from campus resources?

What recommendations do you have for facilitating the student's continuing success?