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Southeast Asian American Students' Perceptions on Influential Faculty Practices on Belonging at a Community College

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SOUTHEAST ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON INFLUENTIAL
FACULTY PRACTICES ON BELONGING AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Pa Vang and Paul Yang. From refugees to college graduates, thank you for bravely navigating the higher education system so I didn't have to alone. Your endless love and support give me the strength to chase my dreams and achieve in ways I never imagined possible. All my successes are because of you. This dissertation is ours.

I would also like to thank the rest of my family. Padmini, your passion for education has inspired me to continue to go further and be better. You are the teacher I will always strive to be. Paulina, for your honesty and encouragement. Patrick, for being the steady, rational voice of the siblings. My little Yoshi, thank you for being by my side to keep me company through the long days and late nights studying and writing. Madeline and Lincoln, you can do anything and be anything, never stop reaching for your dreams.

To all the Hmong scholars that came before me, thank you for paving the way and advocating for me and those who will come after. Your work and commitment do not go unnoticed.

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NOMENCLATURE

CCSM	Community College Success Measure
SEAA	Southeast Asian American

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify how faculty perceive their classroom interactions and practices influence sense of belonging for Southeast Asian American students. Research focusing on the *sense of belonging* in an institution has increased in the recent years and has been identified as a factor in the retention and persistence of college students. Feeling a *sense of belonging* is important when working with populations of underserved and underrepresented populations. The SEAA population is important because they have been lost in the shadow of the "model minority myth", assuming to be successful in navigating higher education, while in reality, not persisting at the rate of other Asian populations such as Chinese, Korean, or Asian Indian.

The research was focused on the student perception rather than the faculty. The participants in this study are students from a mid-sized community college in a suburb of Minnesota. The students were invited through email with an anonymous survey to collect their responses. They were also invited to complete an open-ended questionnaire. The interview questions are derived from The Community College Equity Assessment Lab (2018) "Community College Success Measure" national survey.

The qualitative data was analyzed utilizing ground theory methodology of line-by-line open coding followed by axial coding, identifying themes and consistencies in student experiences. Quantitative data was analyzed in SPSS for descriptive statistics and two-tailed t-tests were utilized to identify significant statistical differences.

The research question leading this study is, how do faculty practices and interactions in the classroom encouraging a sense of belonging for SEAA students? The purpose of this

study is to identify key practices faculty identify as creating a greater sense of belonging for

SEAA students in the community college environment and to give recommendations of what

could be done better or more often.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This study sought to identify which faculty practices contribute to Southeast Asian American (SEAA) students' perception of belonging at a community college. Sense of belonging has been identified as a factor in persisting to graduation (Freeman, et al., 2007; Rucks-Ahidiana & Bork, 2020; Tachine, et al., 2017). This demographic group is important because there is an equity gap in the graduation rates of SEAA students in comparison to other Asian groups and their White counterparts. As an SEAA student and faculty member, I have seen many of my SEAA friends and family members drop out of higher education. I have been at the brink of it myself in my educational journey. The blame was put on family and personal obligations, but I often wonder if faculty could make the difference. If faculty supported the student to feel like they were giving enough, even when obligations got in the way, could it have been enough to encourage the student to persist? If it could make a difference, which practices have the most impact? This is what I wanted to find out in this study.

It is important to create a sense of belonging for populations with lower retention and graduation rates, such as SEAA community college students. If a student feels the instructor and institution cares about their success, they are more likely to seek help when needed. With the diverse student population, classroom climate, teaching and learning practices, and relationships are critical in the persistence of students (Nelson Liard, et al., 2008). Colleges provide financial, counseling, and other resources to retain students, but students spend most of their time in classes. Faculty should follow best practices to ensure students are feeling supported and that they belong in the classroom through "engaged teaching, providing academic supports, campus activities, positive messaging, and striving to build learning communities where everyone's voice matters" (Strayhorn, 2019, p.17).

A mixed-methods research design utilizing the grounded theory methodology was utilized for the study. A methodology is a "body of methods and principles which form the basis of research, including the description and explanation of research designs" (Singh & Walwyn, 2017, p. 3). The study leaned toward qualitative because the researcher was interested in hearing personal stories from the participants and uncovering how a student experiences sense of belonging. Qualitative research is an umbrella for different approaches, grouping "case studies, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual tests – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" into one (Aspers & Corte, 2019, p.142). The qualitative method used in the study was a questionnaire with open-ended questions. The quantitative aspect was in the form on an electronic questionnaire. Descriptive data from the questionnaire and qualitative data from the open-ended questionnaire helped to inform the student experiences with faculty. The constant comparative methods bring the two together through continuous comparison in the data collection and analysis phases to see how the data support or disprove one another (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative and quantitative data were used in conjunction to create a greater understanding of the SEAA student's perception of their interaction with faculty regarding sense of belonging.

The model minority myth has been a great disservice to SEAA students. It groups all Asian Americans into a monolithic group (Maramba, et al., 2018). The myth is thought to have started during the 1960's, during the Civil Rights Movement, to show the belief that "society allows those who work hard to achieve the American dream," while blaming failures of other minority groups such as Blacks and Latinos on "values rather than on systemic and socioeconomic inequities" (Museus, 2013, p. 708-709). Her (2014) took it one step further, explaining how the myth pits Asian Americans against other minority groups, while giving the

perception that there are preferred groups. It is a way to silence racial injustice of Black and Brown communities and mask the struggles of Asian American communities (Lee, et al., 2017). When using the term "model minority" it was referring to Asian groups such as the Chinese, Korea, and Japanese Americans (Wagoner & Lin, 2009). These groups immigrated to the United States in the mid-1800s, and they were associated in the media with "academic and financial success" (Her, 2014, p. 35). They were stereotyped as "successful, hardworking, and not experiencing barriers to their success" (Law, et al., 2019, p. 945).

The model minority myth corners SEAA students into a dichotomy that labels them as "perpetual foreigners" or the "model minority", the "Eastern vs. Western", which is the difference between being rejected in the mainstream culture or accepted as "honorary Whites" (Lee, et al., 2017, p. 3). The dichotomy leads to the belief that Asian students are successful and do not need support services, or that they are not an important asset to society, either way being harmful to their success (Wagoner & Lin, 2009). These students are pressured to conform while simultaneously navigating disadvantages such as poverty conditions and the lack of support at home to navigate higher education. This can have effect on the student's self-esteem and confidence creating a sense of feeling as though they do not belong (Strayhorn, 2019).

The students who do not fit into the model minority myth, SEAA students, are often first-generation students whose family has a history of low education level, low income, and high crime levels. Characteristics that are consistent with those of other underserved minority groups in the United States and inconsistent with those Asian ethnicities that are considered a part of the model minority. Due to the grouping of all Asians into one category, the discrepancy between graduation rates and retention of Asian students were comparable to their Caucasian counterparts, therefore reducing the available assistance programs for Asian students. It was not

until 2007, that Asian American Native American Pacific Islander serving institutions were able to get federal funding and considered assistance programs (Lam & Hui, 2016).

Cognitive and non-cognitive factors in addition to knowledge and academics, have both been identified as important part in faculty-student interactions. These factors include student behavior and mindset, which are important to the success of SEAA students. It is important for faculty to employ both factors since mindset is what influences the sense of belonging and finding value in the academic material. The history of SEAA students adds another layer for faculty to uncover to begin to connect with the students. Understanding that these students' experiences divert from the mainstream and therefore require a different approach to success while identifying their unique barriers experience is critical in a meaningful faculty-student relationship (Lancaster & Lundberg, 2019). Talking with students to find their learning needs, observing their behavior in the classroom, and providing them with resources to be successful is building a foundation to that relationship. When the students feel as though faculty believe they can achieve, they feel included, and are more likely to have the confidence that they can achieve (Her, 2014).

Background of the Problem

While the national average of the general population holding a baccalaureate degree is at 28%, the SEAA population ranges from 12% (Laotian) to 26% (Vietnamese), with Hmong and Cambodian coming in at 14% and 13% respectively (Museus, 2013). This is significant because the model minority myth groups SEAA students in with other Asians, such as Korean, Chinese, Indian, who graduate at a rate higher than the national average (Museus & Mueller, 2018). An environment of inequities, policies made for the White men, and lived experiences of teachers in comparison to students continues to feed into the disparity of these rates (DePouw, 2018). The

grouping creates an inaccurate representation of the success rate and needed support by SEAA students. This continues into the classroom if the teachers do not represent the population that they are serving.

When the statistics are laid out and the great discrepancy is apparent, the significance of the research to encourage successful college students among the SEAA community is crucial. In many communities across the country, the SEAA people are one of the fastest growing minority group in the state (Iannarelli, 2014; Supple, et al., 2010). The challenges become helping the students adapt to mainstream culture, while keeping in context the importance of family ties and parental cultural beliefs (Supple, et al., 2010).

In the Supple, McCoy, and Wang (2010) article, "…youth may feel a sense of cultural distance from school due to their family's cultural background, their relatively lower socioeconomic standing, and due to parental restrictions on their behaviors…" (p. 3). The findings show that there are many factors influencing the success of SEAA students in higher education, exploring what can be done to alleviate what the school policies can control to encourage the success of these students is key. SEAA students experience discrimination and microaggressions daily, and feelings of self-doubt due to these exchanges (Gloria, et al., 2017). "Whiteness in the context of education means that the culture is represented in curricular materials, protection from negative expectations of academic ability due to race, and ability to ensure that needs, interests, and concerns remain at the center of institutional initiatives (DePouw, 2012, p.226)." In the Maramba and Palmer (2014) study, they found students felt strong support when professors validated their cultural identities. A student shared that "she learned her culture was something she should not be ashamed of or made to feel that something is wrong with her culture (p. 521)." Students need to have an environment where they are

comfortable to make mistakes and learn from them to succeed rather than looking constantly to fit into a place.

Statement of the Problem

Persistence and graduation rates are significantly lower in Southeast Asian students in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts. Not all students seek out resource and student engagement services, but all students have classroom experiences. Identifying what faculty do to encourage sense of belonging to the greater college community can have a great impact on the persistence of students. The specific problem is that there is a gap in knowledge of how SEAA students perceive faculty practices in influencing their sense of belonging.

In the United States, approximately 59% of first-time college students will complete their degree within six years. To illustrate the disparities, approximately 14% of people of SEAA ethnicities hold a bachelor's degree in comparison to 54% Koreans, Chinese, and Japanese (Museus, et al., 2016). Grouping all the ethnic minorities in the same "Asian American" statistics is very misleading. While 60% of Asian college students are enrolled in four-year universities, it is often American born Chinese, Korean, and Japanese groups who represent this number. Since this population have been labeled as "intelligent and motivated and they possess a strong work ethic… they are not in need of student services and other retention-serving programs" (Maramba & Palmer, 2014, p. 516). The model minority myth masks the needs and struggles of SEAA students in higher education. It is also considered one of the biggest reasons there has been a lack of research on factors that contribute to Asian American success in higher education (Meseus, et al., 2016).

Lancaster and Lundberg (2019) reported that 75% of the students cited interactions with faculty as the primary sources of sense of belonging to the institution and feeling connected to

the greater college community. This shows how much students value faculty connection. However, a disproportionate number of students who drop out of higher education are from historically underserved populations (Nelson Laird, et al., 2008; Tachine, et al., 2017). SEAA students present a different set of challenges with the difference in culture and the lack of previous academic experiences from support at home.

It is more difficult to create a sense of belonging for SEAA students because of the cultural difference. It takes a deliberate faculty member to have the historical knowledge of their students' backgrounds. This helps the student feel seen and important to the college community (Her, 2014; Museus, et al., 2016). This study identified those things that made SEAA students feel most like they belonged and can encourage further studies that have a further geographical reach.

<div style="text-align: center;">Purpose of the Study</div>

The purpose of this exploratory study was to determine what faculty do that contributes to a Southeast Asian American students' sense of belonging. Exploratory research approach is utilized for a better understanding of the issue rather than finding conclusive answers. It can also be done before beginning research to help direct a study. This approach requires changing direction as new insights are revealed focused on the research question, while allowing room for future research with a larger or different population or setting (Saunders & Thornhill, 2012). In this study, an exploratory method was chosen due to the minimal amount of research on SEAA students in community colleges.

The study utilized questions derived from the *Community College Success Measure (CCSM)* identified as things faculty do to influence students' experiences. The study used a mixed-methods, sequential quan → QUAL approach, beginning with an electronic questionnaire

and an invitation to participate in a structured focus group to gain greater insight into the survey responses. Utilizing the empirical epistemology, student experiences and testimonials informed the study of how faculty influence sense of the belonging in the classroom. Epistemology is a set of beliefs in how the world is perceived, knowledge is understood, and how the reality or perceptions relate to everything around it (Singh & Walwyn, 2017). The empiricism thesis suggests, "we have no source of knowledge in [a subject] or for the concepts we use in [the subject] other than sense experience" (Markie, 2017). Therefore, truth is embedded in the experiences of each student. Each student's story became a part of the reality and contributed to the gap in knowledge that the study sought to fill.

Significance of the Study

The model minority myth has left the SEAA students in the shadows, without the support to succeed in community college and higher education. This study sought to find how faculty can influence SEAA students' sense of belonging, as it is an identified factor in the persistence of students. While faculty can identify what they believe happens in the classroom, student perception is most important in this study, as it will inform how faculty practices are interpreted.

The SEAA community has historically been grouped with the all-encompassing "Asian" community. The model minority myth that is associated with Asian students creates a disservice to SEAAs because it assumed, they do not need academic, personal, or retention-focused support services (Maramba & Palmer, 2014). SEAA students thrive and complete their degree at a significantly lower rate in comparison to their Asian counterparts.

The focus on community colleges is critical since the majority of SEAA students are primarily concentrated in community colleges. Nearly half of the SEAA students who enroll in the community college do not ever receive their associate's degrees, the highest number being at

47.5 percent of Hmong students to 33.7 percent of Vietnamese students, with Laotian and Cambodian students falling in between (Vang, 2018, p.18). The basic tenant of a community college is to, "to educate the students who walk through their doors" (CCCSE, 2016, p.2). Community colleges need to have resources for faculty learn how to guide students who are not prepared and how to serve as cultural navigators.

While there has been more research on the student services aspect on educational success, the recommendations for community college faculty have been limited. Since there is not a lot of research on SEAA students in community colleges, the limited amount of recommendations to help with persistence for these students within these types of institutions are expected to be low (Xiong & Lee, 2011). There is resounding agreement that the SEAA student population is underserved in college, Wagoner and Lin (2009) indicated that inadequate academic preparation and institutional support contributed to Southeast Asian students being at education risk in higher education.

Theoretical Framework

The framework utilized to guide the study was Tinto's theory of academic and social integration model of institutional departure (1993). It identified what factors contribute to the retention of students, defined as continuous enrollment of a student from one year to the next. There are two specific systems that impact a student's retention or attrition, one being academic and the other being social (Burke, 2019).

Tinto's theory suggested there were three stages that contribute to a student's departure from an institution. In the first stage, students would have to separate themselves from their old communities to adapt to the new one (of higher education), the second was to move towards the final adoption to the norms of the new community, and the last stage was to completely integrate

into the new community (Aljohani, 2016). This has since been proven flawed, especially for SEAA students. Maramba & Palmer (2014) noted in their article that family values is identified as a crucial contribution to SEAA students' ability in higher education, through emotional, financial, spiritual, and familial (childcare) support (Xiong & Lam, 2012).

The literature has changed since Tinto's assimilation claim, with a recommendation for colleges to adapt more practices of cultural identity into their programs and support systems throughout their college community (Rucks-Ahidiana & Bork, 2019). The research also found that student clubs and ethnic programs help minority students to connect to their own cultural communities which promote success, but success is also found through the student's family and community (Meseus, et al., 2016; Strayhorn, 2019). These are factors that help build the sense of belonging within higher education.

While Tinto's phases of assimilation are rejected within the updated research, the basic principles are still widely cited (Aljohani, 2016; Burke, 2019). The basic principles of retention are associated with involvement in the college community (Rucks-Ahidiana & Bork, 2019). The involvement (see Figure 1), taken from Burke (2019), illustrates this model. It refers to commitment of the student to their personal academic goals and to the institution. Faculty play a role in the social interaction with the students, as well as the intellectual development and performance. This model shows that positive support and interaction with faculty the student's departure decision would be positive (as in the student would retain), while negative interactions would lead to the student choosing to leave. Therefore, Tinto's theory is still a relevant framework to guide how faculty interaction can influence retention.

Figure 1

Tinto's Institutional Departure Model (1993)
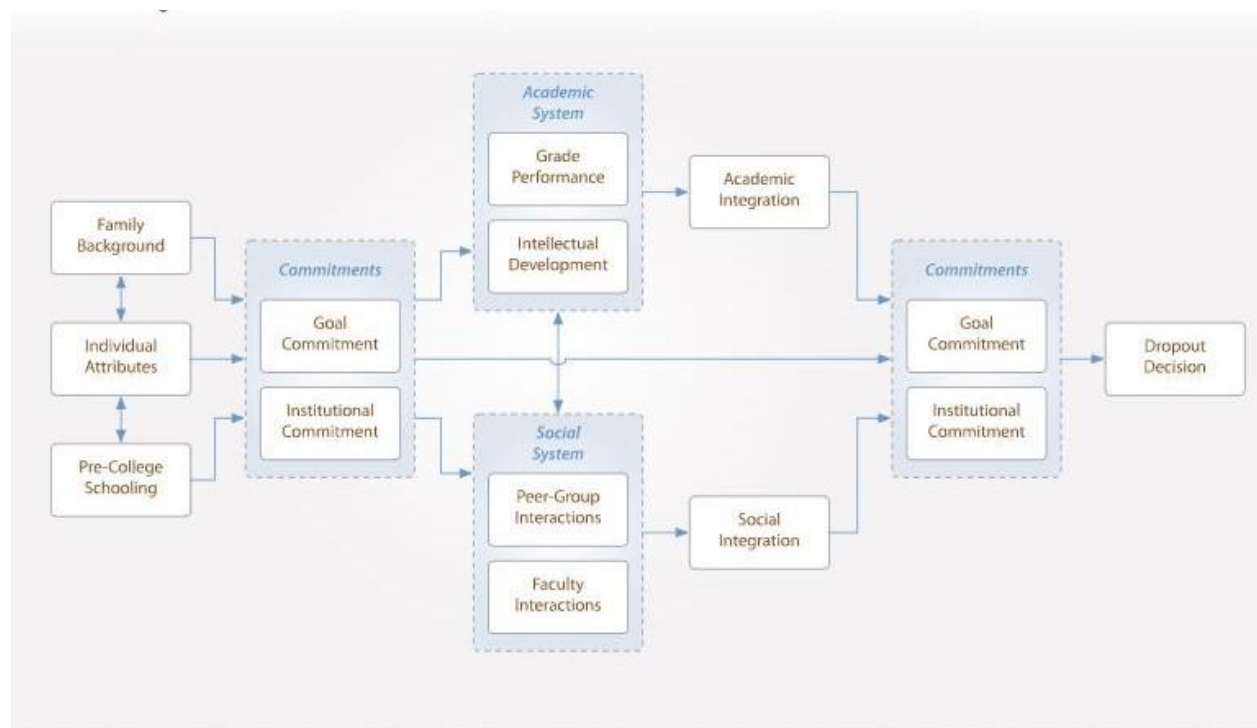
Note. Tinto's Institutional Departure Model (1993). The decision for a student to leave an institution is based on two realms: academic or social. From "Student Retention Models in Higher Education," by A. Burke, 2019, *College and University, p. 94*.

Tinto's framework also puts most of the responsibility of retention and success in the actions of the students. DePouw (2012) adds to the criticism by explaining situations when the Hmong students are expected to do the work of the college to teach their peers about diversity, while at the same time the college is cutting Hmong culture and language classes. She identified these situations as "disrespectful and coercive; they also add insult to injury" to the Hmong students who desire the opportunity to embrace their culture in academia (p. 230). This study focuses on the students' perceptions of faculty actions that influence decisions on retention. Ultimately, it is the student who does make the decision to stay or drop out," however, classroom interactions have impact on the decision.

Strayhorn's (2019) cultural navigators places the responsibility on the educational professionals including counselors, advisors, and faculty. It brings to light the importance of guiding students into the culture of higher education through learning the codes and pathways to success. It also stresses the feedback system of not only taking in the new culture but finding the value in the student and creating a safe space where the student can contribute to the greater community as well. Only 25 percent of pre-college factors, such as grade point average (GPA) and other entrance exam scores, is attributed to success in college. The other three quarters is likely dependent on the educational community such as faculty interaction, navigating support services like financial aid and registering for classes, and sense of belonging. There is also a feedback loop between cultural navigators and students in higher education (see Figure 2). The important part of this model is that success does not just mean retention and persistence, it means the successful completion of a degree.

Figure 2

Cultural Navigators Feedback Model
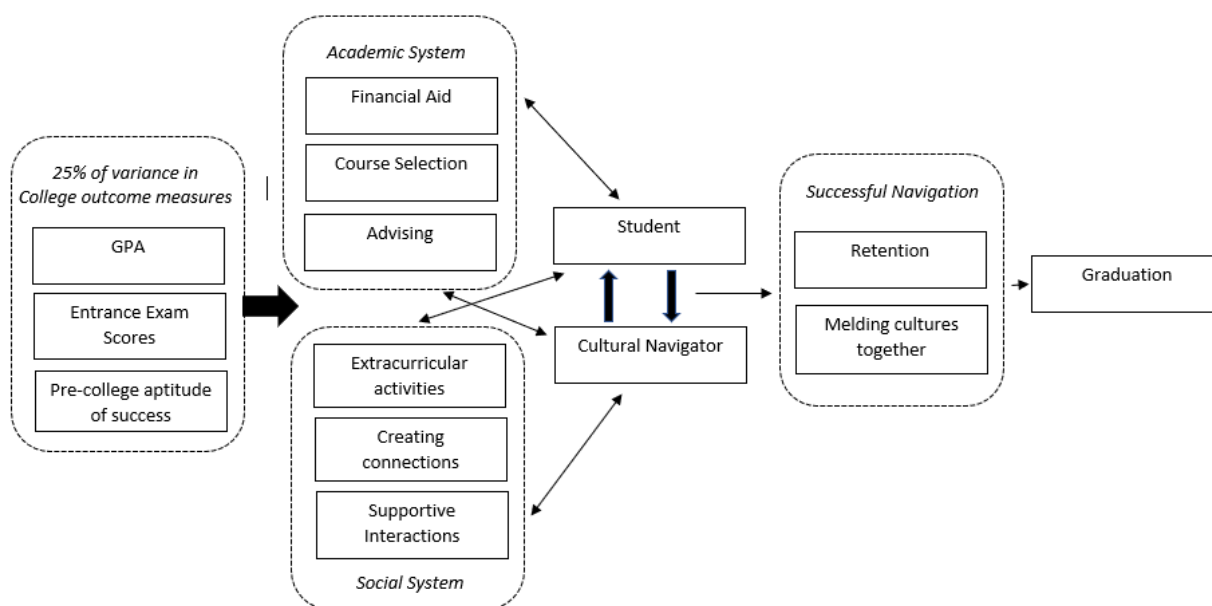
Note. Cultural Navigators Feedback Model is based on Strayhorn (2019) definition of cultural navigators, their interaction with students through the academic and social systems and their role in students' persistence to graduation.

Research Question

Research questions for a qualitative study should reflect that "all knowledge is derived from experience" (Briggs, et al., 2012). As this question has not yet been extensively answered in previous research for this demographic, a mixed-methods study was used to try to identify key practices to develop recommendations for faculty who work with SEAA students. The research question was:

RQ: Which faculty practices do SEAA students perceive as influential to their sense of belonging to their community college?

Definitions of Variables

Variable A: Faculty practices

Constitutive Definition: Identified teaching behaviors that are associated with student outcomes (Hanson, et al., 2016).

Variable B: Southeast Asian

Constitutive Definition: A group of people who came to the United States as refugees after 1975. The second wave of SEAA people were modest in socioeconomic and educational background consisting of Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese refugees (Museus, 2013).

Variable E: Sense of belonging

Constitutive Definition : Strayhorn (2019) defines sense of belonging to a college as, "students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers" (p. 4).

Research Ethics

Permission and IRB Approval

In order to conduct this study, the researcher completed training through the National Institutes of Health in "protecting human research participants" (See Appendix A). She also sought MSUM's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to ensure the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects (Mills & Gay, 2019) (See Appendix B). Likewise, authorization to conduct this study was granted by the Century College institutional research director (See Appendix C).

Informed Consent

Protection of human subjects participating in research will be assured. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study via the Method of Assent (See Appendix D) that the participants read before taking the electronic survey. Participants were aware that this study is conducted as part of the researcher's Doctorate Degree Program and that it will benefit her teaching practice. Informed consent means that the participants have been fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study for which consent is sought and that they understand and agree, in writing, to participating in the study (Rothstein & Johnson, 2013). Confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms (e.g., Student 1) without the utilization of any identifying information. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time from the online questionnaire or focus group will be outlined both, verbally and in writing. This is an ethically low-risk study.

Limitations

A limitation to this study is the size of the sample due to conducting the research in one institution in the Midwest and the participants will be self-selected. The sample population may not be representative of the whole because those who participate may be the ones who utilize school services to support their education and are more active in the college community. The sample coming from one institution is also limiting because the experiences of students from other parts of the country, or even out of the city, could vary greatly. Also, an electronic questionnaire does not account for participants to share personal experiences. An electronic questionnaire also can create barriers for those who are not technologically savvy or have the technology specifications available.

Conclusion

It is important when looking at SEAA students that the all-encompassing Asian statistics are disaggregated to find representative data. Failure to separate SEAA students from their Chinese, Japanese, and Korean counterparts is detrimental to retention of these students (Maramba et al., 2018). Student behavior and mindset has been identified as key factor to persistence to graduation, of which can be influenced by feeling like they belong within an institution.

Chapter one provided an overview of what the model minority myth is and how it does not fit as a SEAA student stereotype. This misconception stunted federal funding for these groups which could be correlated to the low graduation rates. Sense of belonging is a critical factor in the retention of marginalized students through faculty interaction. Tinto's departure model illustrated how faculty can impact the retention of students. A mixed-methods approach was utilized, beginning with an electronic questionnaire, followed by focus groups. Chapter two dives deeper into existing literature on SEAA education influences, sense of belonging in education, and faculty-student relationships. An overview of the theoretical framework will be discussed though existing literature.

CHAPTER 2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there is research on Southeast Asian American (SEAA) students in higher education, it is limited on their sense of belonging to the institution, and even more limiting when it comes to how faculty practices help influence that sense of belonging. The literature review focuses on these three areas of research, separately, to identify what has been studied and why this study is important in the success of SEAA students. The review shows the gap in knowledge, while bringing what is already known to create the foundation. Sense of belonging is the focus as SEAA students come from a collectivist culture that values support from family and campus cultural communities to persist through challenging times (Museus, et al., 2016).

Southeast Asian American Students

The model minority myth has been a huge disadvantage to SEAA students. Her's (2014) study found that by the 11th grade, a high percentage of SEAA students are not college ready. The SEAA communities immigrated to the United States as a mean of survival and struggled with English proficiency, live in poverty, and have low educational attainment. The stereotype lumping all Asian Americans together does not take into consideration the difference of language, countries of origin, culture, history, socialization process, and learning preferences" (Her, 2014, p. 35).

The system needs to adapt and change to serve the increase in the SEAA population. The growing population poses a challenge to educators, healthcare providers, and communities due to the different needs of these students. Maramba and Palmer (2014) found in their study that students need to feel a sense of cultural familiarity, instructors understanding and allowing the students to talk about issues with discrimination and microaggressions, cultural expression, the

ability to culturally identify on campus, and cultural advocacy, opportunities to advocate for their community and other communities of color.

In the review of literature, it was found that student clubs and ethnic programs help minority students to connect to their own cultural communities, which promote success, but success is also found through the student's family and community (Meseus et al., 2016). Lor (2008), indicated five clusters of topics that influence matriculation and retention of Hmong students, with two of the five having to do with family. A supportive family environment included encouragement from their parents and siblings. Family influence and support is so important that more SEAA students are more likely to be influenced to choose an institution that is close to home (Maramba, et al., 2018). Often, siblings were role models for them to attend college. Not only does immediate family play a role in the academic career of the Hmong student, but other family members as well, such as in-laws. Culturally, they are a closely-knit group organized around kin and community membership and value collective identity and action rather than individualism (Rubright, 1993).

Life lessons and embracing hardships and challenges were identified as a motivator in success, such as the desire to move socially and academically, personally, but also for their parents. Another common theme was embracing the hardships of their own or their parents being refugees of the Vietnam War and the struggle to come to the United States for safety. Participants shared stories of the struggles their parents experienced growing up without formal education and desired more for their own life. The theme the participants shared was they learned to work hard for what they want and that nothing in life comes easy. Lor (2008) identified the life lessons and hardships as the mindset that helped the students work through the challenges of college.

The student services identified as most influential on the success of Hmong students was financial services and academic advising (Xiong & Lee, 2011). Financial aid allowed the students to focus primarily on their education which contributed to a higher probability of graduation. Agreeing with this finding, Maramba, Palmer, Kang, & Yull (2018) concluded that southeast Asian students were more likely to choose a higher education institution based on the financial aid offered and how it influenced the cost. A participant in Lor's (2008) study

"expressed deep appreciation for the benefits and support they received from federal and state programs… Due to this, he wanted to graduate from college and contribute to the society… He was not going to waste the peoples tax dollars that supported his family" (p. 47).

Academic advising differs from institutions and even between the programs within the same institution. Some types of advising are required, independent, developmental, to high involvement (Xiong & Lam, 2012). From across the literature there are students who found their counselors or advisors to be very helpful and influential, to belittling and discouraging (Maramba et al, 2018). A participant in Wagoner & Lin's (2009) study said, "I wish it had given us more information on class drop deadlines, and how not to fall into academic probation…" (p. 44). The need for administrators and advisors who understand the background and culture is crucial in coaching the students through college. Colleges need to start moving past just the effort to try to reach SEAA students by encouraging cultural activities and start employing people who are representative of the students (Rubright, 1993; Xiong & Lee, 2011; Wagoner & Lin, 2009).

Community College

Community college is an important setting to focus on because while it makes higher education more accessible to the community, there is a 46% drop out rate within three years of

enrollment of SEAA students (Schudde, 2019). Community college is often seen as a steppingstone to transfer to a four-year institution; however, in 2011, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reported only about 29 percent of students went on to a four-year institution. Furthermore, among those 29 percent that transferred, only 42 percent of them earned a bachelor's degree by 2017 (Arnaud, 2019).

SEAA students tend to make the decision of college choice based on the cost of attendance, and they are more likely to listen to family members about these decisions and stay closer to home (Maramba, et al., 2018). According to one participant of Wagoner and Lin's (2009) study, it made the transition from high school to college less disruptive for the family.

> "I think [my attending the local community college] helped transition my mom to feel like, 'okay, I'm letting her go to the community college.' And, I had the mind-set that they were going to see me go away so why not make it slower for them. And I wasn't ready to leave home yet. I wasn't ready to leave my friends or family" (p. 52).

A study by Lee (2007) found that 2/3 of Hmong students surveyed reported that they "remained very close with family members and most often sought help from each other (p.12).

Another reason SEAA students choose community colleges is based on cost. This demographic of students is from economically challenged backgrounds, in general, and therefore often have to work while in school. Of students entering community college, 29 percent work over 30 hours a week, with 95 percent of those students work off campus. This can have a great effect on their schooling because while 64 percent say being a student and working are equally as important, 60 percent of the participants report working full-time as a possible reason for withdraw, while 67 percent say inadequate finances could cause them to withdraw (CCCSE, 2020).

There are many reasons an SEAA student may choose a community college. Research finds that many start their educational journey there. It is important to help increase the graduation rates, and that starts with retention from one semester to the next. Faculty engagement has been found to be a factor in retention and persistence for students. However, some research has indicated that the interactions between students of color and faculty who provide positive engagement opportunities are limited (Xiong, Lor, Lorchueya, 2020). The next section discusses the importance of student-faculty interaction.

Student-Faculty Interaction

The classroom has become a crossroad between social and academic integration. Especially in the case of community college students, since they live off campus, and often have work and family obligations. The role of faculty in the classroom leading discussions rather than straight lecture creates a sense of academic community. This also influences a sense of belonging as students build relationships with their classmates and instructor that ultimately encourages persistence. A faculty participant of the Dwyer (2017) study stated, "The motivation I think is that they do develop relationships with some of the lecturers and they don't want to let the lecturer down in some ways… they want to stay and for us to be proud of them" (p. 330). A student participant in the study pointed out that approachability is the difference between "…I am out the door" and completing the course.

Chickering and Gamson's seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education outline the best indicators of engagement, which leads to students valuing what they are learning in the classroom, and ultimately persistence (1987) (as cited in Nelson Laird et al , 2008). It includes: "student-faculty contact… high expectations, and a respect for diverse talents and ways of learning… also important to student learning are learning environments that students perceive

to be inclusive and affirming…" (p. 86). This also requires the institution to allocate appropriate resources and learning opportunities in which students can participate. Faculty need resources to provide out of classroom or innovative, in-class activities to feed the needs of the students to feel engaged and like they have a place at the institution (Lancaster & Lundberg, 2019). Xiong, Lor, and Lorchueya (2020) also identified "faculty efforts to build a relationship with a student, welcome their engagement, and validate them" as key practices faculty can do as found in previous research on community colleges and male students of color (p.1).

Along with the in-class contact, Nelson Laird, Chen, and Kuh (2008) also identified out of class interaction as a slight part of higher persistence rates at an institution. This includes talking about career plans and participation in out-of-class activities such as orientation to the institution. Lor (2008) quoted a student when discussing factors encouraging matriculation and persistence:

> "The professor went out of his own way to guide me when I was accepted into the program. We had an informal professional relationship, which was important for me. Our discussions were not always about academics. He had an open door policy. In turn, I felt accepted and appreciated. The professor provided me with hope and confidence that I will graduate" (p. 42).

Deliberate mentorship is a way this can be achieved so both parties "are interested in sharing their backgrounds, personal strengths, limitations and goals" (Ingraham, et al., 2018). Strayhorn (2019) refers to these mentors as "cultural navigators". They help students navigate through the new college culture while supporting and respecting the students' past experiences and background.

School climate and promoting safe and supportive environments are based on five dimensions: "safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional environment, and the school improvement process" (Bellibas & Liu, 2016). With three of the five specifically pertaining to student-faculty relationships, this is an important part of student retention and performance. These social resources must be consistent interactions that "enhance human capacity" and allow for the students to "act purposefully toward goals" (p. 139). Faculty are responsible for supporting social, psychological, and cognitive development in the classroom and within the institution as a whole (Adams, 2014).

The preparation of faculty in cognitive and non-cognitive factors is essential in providing an environment that fosters the growth of students of all backgrounds. Cognitive factors include academic performance while non-cognitive factors refer to the students' personal skills, such as behavior and "strategies students utilize in the educational setting" (p. 39). Faculty must be able to foster an academic mindset of belonging and belief in the students' abilities. Some things that can contribute is historical knowledge. Faculty education on the historical trauma students may be suffering or knowing the general background in relation to socioeconomic and sociopolitical forces that influence the students' journey to higher education. Being culturally responsive and sensitive to the students in the classroom could create an environment of belonging, trust, and encouragement, which is associated with college persistence (Her, 2014).

Sense of Belonging in Education

Teacher and student interaction in higher education is important in ensuring the student feels a sense of belonging to an institution. "Terrell L. Strayhorn defines [sense of belonging] as the student's perception of affiliation and identification" with the institution (Eunyoung & Irwin, 2013, p. 120). Newman, Wood, and Harris (2015) takes it a step further and explains that it

guides how the student interacts with others. It is a sense of feeling connected to the institution, feeling valued and respected. "A sense of belonging is a critical facilitator of student success in postsecondary education, particularly for historically underrepresented and underserved students" (p. 567).

A greater sense of belonging has shown associations with positive educational experiences as young as elementary school. A teacher's temperament created the community for the classroom. For example, if the teacher was warm, supportive, and encouraged cooperation and student thinking, students found the classroom to be a positive community. In middle and high school, this trend continued with students' sense of belonging dependent on the sense of mutual respect within the classroom along with good behavioral management (Freeman, et al., 2007, p.205).

In higher education, "empirical studies have shown that the quality of teacher-student relationships tend to decline" (as cited in Freeman et al, 2007, p. 206). This is especially important to note as students leave the safety net of high school into the new experiences and responsibilities of college. Strayhorn (2019) argued that sense of belonging is a basic human need and has the capability to drive human behavior. To fulfill this human need, students seek belonging to student groups, religion, sports, and various other activities.

Sense of belonging is shown to be less prevalent in students outside of the dominant culture (Meeuwisse et al, 2010). This is important to note because these students from marginalized groups from the mainstream are the students who have lower retention and graduation rates (Strayhorn, 2019). Experiencing racism contributes to feeling marginalized and increased feelings of isolation (Tachine, et al., 2017). The lack of a sense of belonging within an institution has been associated with negative experiences such as, mental illness and attrition.

The feeling of social alienation and loss of positive interactions from failure to establish connection with others can lead to thoughts of suicide, anxiety, depression, criminality, and dropping out (Freeman, et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Vincent Tinto's Departure Model

Vincent Tinto's Institutional Departure Model brings the idea of persistence to include many aspects of the college experience. He identified family, individual skills and abilities, and prior schooling as things that have an impact on a student before entering the institution. He also took into consideration the student's own commitment to their goals and institution as well as how the institution supports the student through intellectual development, academic performance, peer-group, faculty, and social interactions (Connolly, 2016).

Tinto's model was introduced in 1987 as one of the "best compilations of ideas about understanding student departure" (Braxton, 2019, p.130). He suggested that student motivation stemmed from academic and social aspects of education, while identifying motivation as a main factor in students persisting through college (Tachine et al, 2017). When a student believes that their relationship with faculty is insignificant, it lowers their motivation and will likely withdraw socially (Freeman et al, 2007).

This exposes critiques of Tinto's limitations as research has found that when engaging with faculty in the same manner, students of "racial majority and racial minority groups" have very different experiences. Racial minority groups often have negative experiences that impact future engagement with faculty (Museus, et al., 2017). He also proposed the need to detach from a previous community. This separation of previous communities affected students of color disproportionately as they are the most likely to experience a greater change regarding cultural

values (Museus, et al., 2017). As a response to this critique, some researchers have suggested

revising Tinto's theory to include student perceptions of the college environment or climate and

cultural capital (Braxton, 2019). In the revisions made, the consistency has been the concept of

social integration and the concept of culture.

While there are limitations, at the core, Tinto's theory is still a reflection of retention

within higher education. He wrote "there appears to be an important link between learning and

persistence… Involvement with one's peers and with the faculty, both inside and outside the

classroom, is itself positively related to the quality of student effort and in turn to both learning

and persistence" (Tinto, 1993, p. 71). In coupling this theory along with sense of belonging,

which encourages students to perceive and experience their environment and interactions

through their own cultural lens, Tinto's theory acts as a foundation, while the sense of belonging

factor appreciates the culture and background of the students (Museus, et al., 2017).

Cultural Navigator

Tinto was not completely off when he suggested that students need to let go of their

culture and assimilate into the new. However, researchers like Terrel Strayhorn (2014) fill in

those culturally insensitive gaps in Tinto's framework with cultural navigators. Students must be

socialized to the culture to find success in it, by learning the codes to success, this does not mean

completely dismissing their background, but taking in the new as well. Cultural navigators are

those who have access to the "codes of conduct, customs, dominant values, language,

requirements, rules, and traditions" that can help students navigate this new culture of higher

education. This often comes in the form of an academic advisor, but can be from anyone who has

experience, such as faculty, parents, peers, coaches, pastors, among others can step into this role

and help guide students as well (p. 59).

Culture refers to the characteristics of a group including its "beliefs, arts, music, cuisine, institutions, and customs to name a few" (Strayhorn, 2014, p. 58). Its exclusionary culture can include things such as acronyms and slang that one would not understand unless immersed within that environment. Financial aid and student support services could be considered higher education culture that outsiders would need help navigating. Xiong and Lam (2014) refer to this very concept when reporting that several of their participants experienced "having difficulties in navigating the higher education system, for example not knowing the academic requirements, admission requirements and campus resources. Kou did not know what 'G.E. courses were'…" (p.137).

Learning the culture does not mean complete assimilation into it. It means learning how to be successful, but also appreciating the different perspectives and value they bring to the college. Cultural navigators must help students feel comfortable in the greater culture in order to dig into their own and share it with others. This is where sense of belonging becomes an important factor, when a student feels safe to be vulnerable and feel like they matter. Then they can take the dominant culture and meld it into theirs to create a culture where they can find academic and personal success (Strayhorn, 2014).

As cultural navigators, faculty members should think of themselves not just as the curators of knowledge, but a guide to help students achieve their goals. Some students may need this guidance through to graduation, while others will begin to navigate on their own. By being that support for students learning the new culture, even when they start to steer their own path, they know assistance is within reach when times get difficult (Strayhorn, 2014).

Research Method

A mixed-methods research design, sequential quantitative-qualitative (quan➔QUAL) was utilized for the study. The quantitative questionnaire was developed based on questions from the *Community College Success Measure (CCSM)*, and the results were used to develop theories along with answers from the open-ended survey. This study relied on the qualitative data of student's personal experiences and stories to inform the research along with the quantitative aspects of factors that impacted sense of belonging.

Qualitative Research

A qualitative research method was employed to conduct this study utilizing grounded theory. Qualitative research answers the question of "how?" and "why?" by studying people in their natural environment, interpreting what they see, hear, and are told, and bringing meaning to them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It focuses on "meanings and motivations that underlie cultural symbols, personal experiences, phenomena and detailed understanding of processes in the social world" (Aspers & Corte, 2019, p. 146). Due to the interpretive nature of qualitative research, the researcher must identify her own bias and acknowledge it when analyzing the data and reporting the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative research can be confusing as it can mean different things to different people (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Different researchers have categorized qualitative approaches into diverse groups. For example, Jacob (1987) categorized approaches according to ecological psychology, symbolic interactionism, and holistic ethnography, while Lancy (1993) organized them into disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, biology, cognitive psychology, and history (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018). While some may see the different categorization as a negative, the diverse perspectives illustrate the long history and development of this approach.

While quantitative research relies on "causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings," qualitative research relies on a contextual world of understanding people through the lens of "human values, culture, and relationships" (Cypress, 2015, p.357). This method focuses on the human experience and interactions to create a narrative. "The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, [and] the reflexivity of the researcher…" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.8).

Conclusion

The literature highlights the need for SEAA research in retention. SEAAs are graduating at lower rates than other groups and are hidden among the model minority myth. The necessity for student-faculty interaction to foster a sense of belonging is critical to the success of underserved populations. To create an institution where students feel comfortable and that they can succeed, includes faculty practices. Tinto's theory suggests that without the support from the institution and social interactions, such as those with faculty, students are more likely to depart from education. Strayhorn's cultural navigators fill the gap of Tinto's theory on cultural assimilation with culturally accurate psychology of students. The next chapter outlines the methodology and design of the study.

CHAPTER 3.   METHODS

Sense of belonging is a factor in the retention of Southeast Asian American (SEAA) students in higher education. Student-faculty interaction has been found to be one contributing feature of students feeling tied to the college community. If a student feels like they belong in an institution, they are more likely to ask for help and persist to graduation. This study focuses on what students perceive faculty do that most influences their feeling of belonging within the institution.

Research Question

RQ: Which faculty practices do SEAA students perceive as influential to their sense of belonging to their community college?

Research Design

The mixed-methods study with emphasis on the qualitative was used to gain insight into the perspectives of students by using their voices to tell the story. Qualitative findings are not generalizable, they are not intended to be used this way, rather they may provide insight for future researchers in similar settings (Denny & Weckesser, 2001). It seeks to "explore, uncover, describe, and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which maybe little is known" (Cypress, 2015, p.356). Grounded theory is within the interpretivist paradigm. This means that their interactions shape their reality, and they define and redefine a phenomenon though social interactions (Briggs, et al.,2012).

Grounded theory methodology was utilized to help develop a theory of which practices students find most influential in their interactions with faculty. Grounded theory lends itself to a sequential approach, first identifying issues and perspectives, then following up with detailed questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Grounded theory began in the early 1960s by Glaser and

Strauss. They constructed methodological strategies that other social scientists could adopt that gave a system for coding interviews with categories that would conceptually identify the theme of the word, line, or phrase (Charmaz, 2006).

Findings are grounded in the data and used to uncover social relationships and behaviors. The method should bring about new ideas and topics that should be explored through fresh eyes of the researcher. It represents a set of guidelines for collecting and analyzing data without restraints and constraints on what can be done. Initial data is important in guiding where further research and data gathering should proceed. Coding is an important part of the analysis stage to help distill the data. It gives a clear category or label that can be used to compare with other data (Charmaz, 2006). Then through constant comparison of data and analysis, a theory can develop (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

The mixed-methods study allowed for students to have a voice and share their personal perspective. Utilizing constructivist paradigm, the students self-reported and meaning came from their responses. This methodology allows for the mixing of qualitative and quantitative data in a single study. It uses closed-ended questions and open-ended questions to collect data utilizing appropriate analysis methods for each. They are integrated and compared though further analysis. This study uses the qualitative data to further explain the quantitative findings (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013). The quantitative findings are important, however, as they provide data for the specific practices of faculty that participants may not discuss. A mixed methods design provides flexibility and ensures that participants' stories are heard.

An electronic questionnaire was distributed to an email list of self-identified Asian students at one of the largest two-year colleges in Minnesota. The questionnaire (See Appendix E) contained quantitative demographic questions to disaggregate the Southeast Asian American

data from other identified Asian ethnicities. It also identified how many credits have been completed, and campus cultural events they have participated in. This was identified in the literature as something that created a sense of belonging to the institution. The rest of the questionnaire had 7-point Likert-scale questions that were focused on sense of belonging. The questions were based on the *Community College Success Measure* that was developed for the purpose of predicting student success in community college (CCSM, 2018). At the conclusion of the questionnaire, the students were invited to join a focus group by sharing their preferred method of contact and available times to meet.

Students who indicated interest, were given options for dates of a focus group or interview. No students responded as interested in taking part after the initial email invitation. Another invitation went out to request individual interviews. That invitation also went without responses, other than those indicating no interest. The researcher, then, sent out an invitation to participate in an open-ended question survey.

Setting

The study took place at a mid-sized community and technical college in the Midwest. The institution has approximately 12,000 students with 42 percent of the enrollment identifying as students of color. The average age of the students in the overall enrollment is 25 years old with 57 percent female and 43 percent male (About Century College, 2020). There are 943 faculty, staff, and administrators. Faculty identified as Asian, make up 5.8 percent, with faculty of color at 12.4 percent. There are 53 staff who identify as Asian, making up 15.4 percent of the staff (see Table 1) (T. Hostetter, personal communication, April 29, 2021).

Table 1

Ethnicities of Century College Faculty, Staff, and Administration

Ethnicity	Staff	Faculty	Administrators	Total
American Indian or Alaska Native	7	2	0	9
Asian	53	34	1	88
Black or African American	17	25	0	42
Hispanic or Latino	13	11	1	25
Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	1	0	0	1
White	213	461	16	690
Unknown/ Did not self-identify	38	47	3	88
Total	342	580	21	943

Note. Data collected from the Century College human resources department on self-identified ethnicities of staff, faculty, and administration. (T. Hostetter, personal communication, April 29, 2021)

The questionnaire was completed online, via Qualtrics. The Qualtrics questionnaire required an internet connection to complete. The students could utilize their cell phones, personal computer or tablet, or the school computers to complete the survey.

The students were invited to participate in a focus group at the conclusion of the survey. With no participants in the focus groups, the researcher developed an anonymous open-ended questionnaire via Qualtrics to distribute to those who provided contact information. The students were advised in the email to participate if they met two conditions, (1) identify as Southeast Asian American and (2) have taken one or more courses at Century Community and Technical

College. The students were instructed to complete the questionnaire in a private setting, with secure internet, as to keep their answers confidential.

Participants

The participants were of Southeast Asian descent, the most common identified in the literature being Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, Thai, and Vietnamese. The researcher also allowed for self-identified SEA ethnicities to participate. The institution has 46 percent students of color, with 17 percent identifying as Asian. While there is the distinction of the 17 percent of the college identified as Asian, there is not of sub-groups such as the specific SEAA or non-SEAA ethnicities (About Century College, 2020). Participants must have taken at least one course at Century Community and Technical College.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select individuals whose backgrounds informed the focus on the study. The questionnaire results provided the details needed to develop focus groups through theoretical sampling. As quoted in Briggs, Coleman, and Morrison (2012),

> Such sampling is essentially strategic and entails and attempt to establish a good correspondence between research questions and sampling. In other words, the researcher samples on the basis of wanting to interview people who are relevant to the research questions" (Bryman, 2008, p. 226)

Utilizing this method, students shared their experiences until there was "saturation" or no more new perspectives (Bryman, 2008, p. 195). Grounded theory has a strong emphasis on comprehensive, in-depth data. Therefore, Briggs, Coleman, and Morrison (2012) recommended keeping a total sample size of 10-25 to have a manageable data set, while still getting an abundance of information.

The sample was self-selected as the students will agree to participate. Participants can choose to participate in the questionnaire without participating in the open-ended survey. The study was designed to invite those participants who indicated interest to a focus group, but after several invitations and no indication of interest, the researcher chose to send out an open-ended survey.

Instrumentation

The Qualtrics questionnaire gathered quantitative data for the study and was expected to take approximately 10 minutes to complete. It consists of four demographic questions about being a first-generation college student, age, ethnicity, and completed college credits. Questions followed to gauge the students' participation in cultural events on campus. The 17 7-point Likert scale questions focused on students' perceptions of faculty practices through the quantitative measure and further explored the concept of sense of belonging through the qualitative measure. The faculty practices in the questionnaire was identified with a relationship to sense of belonging based on the CCSM (See Appendix E).

The open-ended survey was also created in Qualtrics. It consisted of four open-ended questions, first a calibration question defining sense of belonging, then moving into personal experiences of belonging, not belonging, and important things faculty can do to foster belonging (see Appendix F).

Open-ended questions are questions that require participants to provide responses in their own words. There are no pre-set answers to choose from. This gives the opportunity for the researcher to gain rich and comprehensive insight on the topic. Participants can give more open and honest answers rather than feeling like they are in a dichotomous box. The limitation with

open-ended questions, however, is that the questions can be misinterpreted, therefore when constructing questions, the researcher must be explicit in their wording (Reja, et al. , 2003).

Data Collection

Data were collected first by completing the consent form and the questionnaire with demographics and quantitative data about their perception of faculty interaction and sense of belonging. Then, the open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data on personal experiences of sense of belonging. All data was stored in Qualtrics and then saved on a excel spreadsheet on a password protected computer, or into the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) for analysis.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were taken from the online questionnaire, Qualtrics, and the information was sorted by percentages which questions students agreed and disagreed with most frequently. Descriptive data were collected from the quantitative data along with tests for significant statistical differences utilizing the t-test.

The qualitative data analysis will involve memoing and casual coding using the written responses from the questionnaire, following a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is a method that requires constant critical analysis of data and the expectation of flexibility as data builds upon each other (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Constant comparison requires the researcher to practice "memoing" as ideas and themes begin to develop. Memoing is the act of taking notes while going through the data, this happens at all stages of analysis. As more data is reviewed, the researcher continues to develop ideas and themes.

Open coding was used to identify categories by using line-by-line analysis and establishing categories from each line. It was followed by axial coding to establish relationships

between the categories and ultimately themes. Coding involves putting tags or labels against large or small pieces of data to attach meaning to them for further use. They may be pre-specified based on the aims of a project or emerge as the analysis proceeds (Briggs, et al., 2012).

The table below (see Table 2) provides a description of the alignment between the study Research Question(s) and the methods used in this study to ensure that all variables of study have been accounted for adequately.

Table 2

Research Question Alignment

Research Question	Variables	Design	Instrument	Items	Technique
Which faculty practices do SEAA students perceive as influential to their sense of belonging to their community college?	V1: Faculty Practices	Survey	Online Questionnaire (Appendix E)	Q 2.1-15	Online Survey
		Survey	Online Open-Ended Questionnaire (Appendix D)	Q 2, 3, 4	Online Survey
	V2: Southeast Asian American Students	Survey	Online Questionnaire (Appendix E)	Q1.1 – 1.5	Online Survey
	V3: Sense of Belonging	Survey	Online Questionnaire (Appendix E)	Q2.16-17	Online Survey
		Survey	Online Open-Ended Questionnaire (Appendix F)	Q1, 2, 3	Online Survey

Procedures

Utilizing the email listserv from the college, the initial email was sent out at the beginning of the semester, within the first three weeks of September. The questionnaire was open for four weeks, with a reminder email sent after the 2nd week. The data from the Qualtrics questionnaire was be stored on a password protected computer. It was be imported and analyzed utilizing SPSS on a protected server with the only identifying features being the participant number assigned in the program during data collection.

From those responses, the predetermined focus group questions were revisited to ensure they were aligning to the data from the questionnaire. Further questions were added if the researcher deems it necessary, however, the total guiding questions should not exceed five questions. The researcher emailed invitations to those participants who expressed interest in joining a focus group. The invitation was emailed two to four weeks after the close of the questionnaire with the meeting no more than 6 weeks after. With no response or responses of no interest in the focus groups, the researcher sent out last invitations for focus groups or individual interviews at the beginning of December. As the semester was winding down, the researcher waited until mid-January, at the start of spring semester, to meet with key gatekeepers.

With no identified student participants for the focus group or individual interviews, the researcher chose to do an open-ended survey to gather qualitative data. The participants received the consent form in the opening invitation of the questionnaire and survey. In proceeding to the survey, participants gave their consent to contribute to the study.

Subjects were not identified during the questionnaire and or the open-ended survey. The researcher used pseudonyms when describing participants in dissemination of the results. Any personal information, student emails, and survey responses was kept on the researcher's

password protected computer, which is either locked in the researcher's home or office. Any paper copies of notes from the sessions or transcriptions were kept in a locked drawer.

Ethical Considerations

Participants can opt out of the study any time during the questionnaires or analyzing process. There were no identifying features of the students from the questionnaire answers, and the focus group will use pseudonyms such as "Student 1" or a name. This topic could bring out negative feelings about experiences of the students. College counselors are available to students free of charge and their information will be provided should a participant seek it. Overall, ethical considerations are low risk for this study.

Conclusion

The grounded theory guided this research through looking at the data to inform. It sought to take the experiences of students to identify those factors they believed to most influence their sense of belonging. The online questionnaire collected demographic and quantitative data, followed by the open-ended questions to inform the qualitative aspect of the study. The open-ended survey gained insight that may not have otherwise been collected as data. The data were stored on a password safe computer and pseudonyms were utilized to protect the identity of the participants. The next chapter will present the findings from the questionnaire and open-ended survey.

CHAPTER 4. Findings

This chapter contains the results of the grounded theory methodology utilizing constant comparative methods. The study sought to answer the research question:

RQ: Which faculty practices do SEAA students perceive as influential to their sense of belonging to their community college?

This chapter includes analysis of the data to further understand the variables in the research question. The demographics of the sample is included in this chapter with tables to help present the findings. Qualitative and quantitative data were used to illustrate a picture of the variables impacting sense of belonging. The data includes descriptive variables, 16 Likert-scale questions on faculty practices, concluding with a Likert-scale question on the student's sense of belonging, and an open-ended questionnaire. Statistical analysis and coding were used to analyze the data.

The data analysis led to the Theory of Secure Interactions. It found that students' sense of belonging was threefold. SEAA students desire a sense of respect and emotional safety in- and outside of the classroom, having to do with coursework and their own personal values. Therefore, the three themes that emerged from the analysis were (1) personal values, (2) in-class experiences, and (3) out-of-class experiences. The qualitative data told the story of each participant through their own lens of impactful experiences, while the quantitative data helped support the stories by giving terminology and previously identified practices impacting belonging to the narrative.

As with any study, it is important to discuss the position of the researcher as it influences data collection and analysis and interpretation (Fink, 2000). The researcher identifies as a SEAA, Hmong, female, faculty at the college in this study. She is passionate in providing inclusive in

and out of classroom environments for students of all backgrounds, specifically SEAA students, and ensuring there is representation in the college. At current, less than 13% of the faculty identify as persons of color, while 27% of staff members are racially. By conducting this study, she hopes to share the findings and recommendations with her peers as the sample is specific to students who have attended the institution.

Sample

There was a total of 197 responses. Thirty-seven did not complete the questionnaire, 19 were non-SEAA students, and 141 participants met the demographic requirements and completed the quantitative questionnaire; self-identifies as SEAA and has taken at least one course at Century Community and Technical College. For the qualitative portion, 29 participants indicated interest during the first questionnaire but, in the end, there were ten (10) responses with eight (8) completing the qualitative questionnaire with open-ended questions with the other two (2) not completing the questionnaire.

The participants were self-identified Southeast Asian American students who were currently or had previously attended Century Community and Technical College. The ethnicities represented in the study were Hmong, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Thai, and participants who identified as "other Southeast Asian". The other Southeast Asian ethnicities included Filipino, Karen, and half Lao, half Hmong participants (see Table 3 for breakdown of participants).

Table 3

Frequency and Percent of Ethnicity of study sample, 141 participants

Ethnicity	Frequency	%
Cambodian	3	2.1
Hmong	113	80.1
Thai	1	.7
Vietnamese	12	8.5
Other SEAA	11	7.8
• 5 Filipino		• 3.5
• 5 Karen		• 3.5
• 1 half Lao, half Hmong		• .8

The students ranged from ages 18 to 48 or over, with two declining to answer. The most prevalent age group was 18-22 years and the next being 23-27 years. The average age was just above the 18-22-year range. Over half the students identified as first-generation college students and have completed 37 or more college credits. The average college credits completed was 25-36 credits (see Table 4 below for spread of frequency for each level).

Table 4

Descriptive data of study sample, 141 participants

	Frequency	Percent
Age Group		
18-22	50	35.5
23-27	42	29.8
28-32	27	19.1
33-37	14	9.9
38-42	4	2.8
43-47	1	.7
48 or over	1	.7
Declined to answer	2	1.4
First Generation Student		
Yes	89	63.1
No	52	36.9
Completed College Credits		
1-12	30	21.3
13-24	16	11.3
25-36	19	13.5
37+	76	53.9

The researcher had difficulty finding participants to join a focus group or interview as initially planned. She reached out to known gatekeepers of the college, such as the Asian Student

Association advisors, Hmong language class instructors, and TRIO and counseling advisors. There was a consensus, especially in light of the pandemic, that the SEAA was a hard population to commit to an interview or focus group. In the end, the researcher chose to do an open-ended questionnaire to invite those 29 students who indicated interest in a focus group, and she invited her current and former SEAA students to participate.

Research Methodology

The theoretical framework, Vincent Tinto's Institutional Departure Model (1993), utilized in this study focuses on the student's actions and perspectives in retention and persistence to graduation. This framework was coupled with Terrel Strayhorn's cultural navigators (2019), that touches on the responsibility on faculty and staff on student persistence. Therefore, the themes and recommendations are based on how students perceive faculty practices. The quantitative and qualitative data were used in a constant comparative model to identify three themes. Through SPSS, the independent t-test was used to determine statistical differences between the variables. The attributes of grounded theory were the foundation of the data analysis procedures for the qualitative portion using open coding to identify initial categories, and axial coding to further substantiate the categories for the themes.

Data and Results of Analysis

In the constant comparative model, the quantitative and qualitative data were assessed to find the three themes that encapsulated the data most clearly. Each of the quantitative variables were sorted into the themes and analyzed for statistical differences. Qualitative data were coded for themes. This chapter discusses the processes utilized for quantitative and qualitative data analysis, and it reports the findings regarding connections between the quantitative and qualitative data and the themes derived from the data.

Qualitative Analysis

Utilizing the responses from the open-ended questionnaire, the researcher started making

sense of the data by categorizing them and interpreting how the categories related to the research

question. This is important as participants did not have the vocabulary to directly identify a

theme, but rather the researcher provided necessary coding to interpret their answers. Word

clouds were created for each of the open-ended questions (see Appendix F) to help with

preliminary coding (see Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6). Then, coding the answers to the open-ended

questions line-by-line, and creating an axial coding paradigm to further determine the themes.

The word clouds (see Figure 3) identified the *student* at the center of the open-ended

survey Question 1 (see Appendix F) on belonging. It was followed by *instructor*, but the less

frequent words in the background tell a story of *blooming* at different rates and being *engaged*

and *encouraged*. It also taps into the negative aspects of how not belonging can make an impact

on students and faculty with the words "*annoy*" and "*doubt*".

Figure 3

Word Cloud for Question 1 in Open-Ended Survey

Note. Collection of all the answers for Question 1 (Appendix F) and the words that were most prevalent to the participants' perception of the definition of belonging

The open-ended survey Question 2 (see appendix F) identifies *belong* and *experience* as positive belonging interactions. The word cloud (Figure 4) focuses on *feeling* and *belonging* and the background words of "*attention*" and "*answer*" give a picture of the student responses.

Figure 4

Word Cloud for Question 2 in Open-Ended Survey

Note. Collection of all the answers for Question 2 (Appendix F) and the words that were most prevalent to the participants experiences where they felt they belonged.

When observing the word cloud (Figure 5) of Question 3 in the open-ended survey (see Appendix F) the *instructor* was in the heart of the cloud. "*Race*" and "age" come up in the background as possible variables in the responses. It also touches on the *community* and *questions* that have a bearing on not feeling like they belong.

Figure 5

Word Cloud for Question 3 in Open-Ended Survey

Note. Collection of all the answers for Question 3 (Appendix F) and the words that were most prevalent to the participants' experiences of not belonging

The last question in the open-ended survey, Question 4 (see Appendix F) discussed the most important thing instructors can do for belonging. The word cloud (see Figure 6) indicates *comfort* and *confidence* is important factors in this. In the background "*everyday*" is present, showing it should not just be a one and done deal, and also "*free*". Some words that may be seen as negative, or things that shouldn't be done, are "*afraid*" and "*alone*".

Figure 6

Word Cloud for Question 4 in Open-Ended Survey

Note. Collection of all the answers for Question 4 (Appendix F) and the words that were most prevalent to the practices students believed to be most impactful on sense of belonging.

These word clouds gave preliminary data on during the coding procedure. Participant responses will be further discussed in each of the themes in this chapter. Table 5 gives a synthesis of participants' responses to the open-ended questionnaire. There was a trend of the desire to feel safe, not stand out, and respected by instructors and other students. In utilizing the constant comparative method between the quantitative questionnaire and the research question, the researcher found that the experiences and desires shared were not just happening in the classroom about class-specific work, but rather in all aspects of the community college experience.

Table 5

Questions and Synthesis of Participants Responses

Open-Ended Survey Questions	Synthesis of Responses
1. What does it mean to you to feel like you "belong"?	• Comfort in and outside of the classroom was discussed by 6 of the participants • Not standing out for race, ethnicity religion, beliefs, clothes • Respect from instructors
2. Share an experience/situation when you felt like you belonged at Century Community and Technical College. (Who/what impacted the way you felt and how?)	• Comfortable asking questions and getting the individual attention needed to be successful • Being treated the same as other students • Sharing similar background and showing interest personally
3. "Share an experience/situation when you did not feel like you belonged at Century Community and Technical College"	• Standing out for being "not white", being seen as a foreigner • Self-doubt • Not understanding extracurriculars or how to participate within the college community

	• Treating students with respect
4. "What do you think is the most important thing an instructor can do to make someone feel like they belong in the classroom?"	• Patience with students learning and opening up personally
	• Recognize student's accomplishments and struggles

The line-by-line open coding found that respect and emotional safety were at the center of experiences shared by the participants. These represent the categories within each of the identified themes. Respect demonstrates dignity and worth, especially with systemic racism and people of color, understanding how it impacts perceptions of one-self and also historical context of the student experience in regards to respect (Liang, et al., 2020). Emotional safety includes encouragement in speaking up and giving students the opportunity to share their thoughts and beliefs in a safe space (Quaglia & Brait, 2019). It leads to feeling as a valued member in the campus community and classroom.

The themes identified were faculty practices impacting their personal values, in-class experiences, and out-of-class experiences. Personal values were categorized for those experiences in and out of the classroom that focused on the experiences that could impact a student's value system, but not necessarily having to do with coursework or the college community. In-class experiences directly dealt with things that are a part of the curriculum, such as teaching, discussions, and group work. Out-of-class experiences focused on interactions outside of class, but about class materials and the greater college community, such as extracurriculars, or getting help before and after class.

The qualitative data give rich insight to the experiences of SEAA students in the classroom and their interaction with those around them, including faculty and sometimes other

students, on sense of belonging. This helps account for the impact of the classroom environment and practices during and outside of the class. The next section will discuss how quantitative data were analyzed to give terminology and sustain the narratives that were found through the open-ended questions.

Quantitative Analysis

The responses used for the Likert-scale questions were (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) somewhat agree, (4) neither agree nor disagree, (5) somewhat disagree, (6) disagree, (7) strongly disagree. A p-value of .05 was used to analyze the quantitative data for significantly statistical differences utilizing the independent samples t-test in SPSS. There were no outliers in the data, as assessed by inspection of a boxplot for each of the questions. While t-tests generally require a continuous scale, and the Likert-scale is considered ordinal, the researcher chose to continue in this case as the analysis was not intended to be used as a critical factor, but rather just pointing to the differences in the findings of this study. It was used to create structure of the narratives. This is also true as best practices utilize the t-test to analyze a construct rather than disaggregated data; however, the goal of this study was to separate the practices and identify those most important in sense of belonging. The quantitative tool, based on previous literature, was utilized to place vocabulary and context to the experiences of the participants.

The researcher chose to analyze the Likert-scale question 16, "I feel I belong at Century Community and Technical College" as a bivariate, while treating "neither agree nor disagree" as "did not answer". The question was treated in this way, as to give the students the opportunity to rate their experiences without having to categorize it as "yes" or "no," but rather a range to allow for better insight on student perception and feelings toward belonging. There were 104 students

who agreed that they felt they belonged at Century College, 13 who disagreed, 21 who neither agreed nor disagreed, and three who declined to answer (see Table 6 for complete data).

Table 6

Frequency and Percent of Likert-Scale Question 16

I feel I belong at Century Community and Technical College.		
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	104	74
Disagree	13	9
Neither Agree or Disagree	21	15
Decline to answer	3	2
Total	141	

The group who felt they belonged will be referred to as "belong group" and those who did not will be referred to as "not belonging group". In doing so, the "not belonging group" is small, therefore, could be a limitation as any statistical difference may be due to chance from a small sample. Due to the nature of the quantitative data in this study as support to the qualitative data, statistical differences were analyzed. The researcher also acknowledges that throughout the analysis, while the Likert-scale questions were treated as an ordinal value, with presumed equality between the levels, it cannot be proven that the responses were equal in intervals (Jamieson, 2004).

Theme 1: Personal Values

Qualitative Data

A personal value is defined as "an enduring perspective, or believe in an end goal state," it impacts every aspect of a person's life, and directs how one reacts and interacts with those around them (Fearon, et al., 2018). In answering the open-ended survey question 1 (see Appendix F) the participants shared features that influenced their sense of belonging. Some were spun in a positive message, like Joua's response of "feeling safe and comfortable with those who are around me." This response discussed the importance of emotional safety. While others responded with discussing what shouldn't happen, such as Pa's response, "I can present myself to the public eye the way I am in terms of what I wear, eat, preach, and do, without public ridicule." This falls into the respect category, where everyone should be valued for what they bring, not "ridiculed" for being different.

Table 7 outlines the specific responses on belonging that impact students' internal values, fears, and desires falling into the coding categories of respect and emotional safety. While this question did not specifically ask what it means to feel like they belonged in the classroom, it was set up to help frame their minds of the concept before moving on to the other questions specific to faculty practices.

Table 7

Open-Ended Survey Question 1 for Theme 1

Coding Categories	Participant's Responses
Respect	Linda: *"Being recognize, address, by your name."*
	Keng: *"To be treated the same as everyone else"*

	Pa: *"I can be in a place where no one will stare at me because I am not 'white'"*
Emotional Safety	Ma: *"I can feel free, comfortable, confident and happy"*

Note. Pseudonyms were given to encourage a storytelling narrative from an anonymous survey

Participants were asked to share a time they felt they belonged at their institution, open-ended question 2 (Appendix F). Linda recalled a time when, "my instructor remembered the name of my newborn child. It shows that they took the time to know and remember the student." This shows the respect the instructor has for the student and that they care about them more than as a student, but everything that impacts the performance of that student. Sue discussed the emotional safety aspect by saying,

> "The people who have had the greatest impact on my life are my professors and teachers
> from high school because they teach, encourage, and motivate me every day by telling
> me I can do anything when I think I can't."

This also illustrates how the instructor cares about the student in a deeper relationship than just as a student but touches on the emotional aspect of feeling reassured. Table 8 further shows the answers that correlated with question 2 in the open-ended survey.

Table 8

Open-Ended Survey Question 2 for Theme 1

Coding Categories	Participant's Responses
Emotional Safety	Keng: *"I always felt comfortable regardless of the fact I was one of the only colored male students in the class of 2021"*

	Song: *"I feel like I belong at Century Community College because it's my dream to be here"*

Note. Pseudonyms were given to encourage a storytelling narrative from an anonymous survey

In open-ended survey question 3 (see Appendix F) students discussed when they did not feel they belonged. Some stories that were shared was Pao who wrote, "throughout years of schooling in general I think I just didn't belong at school" when discussing past experiences, not just with one institution. This points to his emotional safety and perhaps some respect as well. Ma shared some self-doubt of her time as a student sharing,

"I came from Refugee Camp and was not able to speak English the way others do. English is my second language but I had to learn it to be able to communicate with others and to be able to reach my goal. At times, I'd wonder if I had what it takes to be succeed like the students in America do."

Table 9 further shows the experiences of not belonging as it pertains to personal values.

Table 9

Open-Ended Survey Question 3 for Theme 1

Coding Categories	Participant's Responses
Respect	Song: *"Nothing supremely bad but nothing exceptionally good either."*
Emotional Safety	Linda: *"Seeing all the young student make me feel old and I should not be enrolling in the same institute with the younger student. Basically age made me feel out of place."*
	Pao: *"It was hard/ is hard making friends since I see school as place of discipline and skill building"*

Note. Pseudonyms were given to encourage a storytelling narrative from an anonymous survey

Table 10 shows the responses of the participants when asking what important things instructors can do to create a sense of belonging.

Table 10

Open-Ended Survey Question 4 for Theme 1

Coding Categories	Participant's Responses
Respect	*Linda: "Remember students important date or upcoming events."* Keng: *"Acknowledge them like they would any other student, without showing any difference based on any inherent differences they may have from what society considers 'normal' or 'safe'"*
Emotional Safety	Ma: *"The instructor can help by encouraging, motivation, and helping the students, and also know that not all students are fluent in English. Beside doing that, they have to understand not everyone is a quick learner; some just bloom slowly."* Song: *"Comfort and ease the student's doubt."*

Note. Pseudonyms were given to encourage a storytelling narrative from an anonymous survey

Quantitative Data

The quantitative data for personal values category were associated with the "I feel I belong at Century Community and Technical College" value. The questionnaire questions number 1, 3, 4, 6, and 15 (Appendix E) were identified as variables associated with this theme. These questions included the instructor knowing the student's name, respecting them, believe in their success, care about their thoughts and perspectives, and know their academic goals.

The raw data for the theme indicated that the mean of "my instructors know my name" for those who felt that they belonged was 2.37 (*SD* = 1.191) while those who did not feel like they belonged was at a mean of 3.62 (*SD* = 2.256). While these seem to have a range of average mean, with those who agreed they belonged between "agree" and "somewhat agree", while those who did not believe they belonged between "somewhat agree" and "neither agree or disagree", there was no significant statistical difference between the two groups. Question 3 about respect was also found to have no significant statistical difference.

There was significant statistical difference between the two groups on the remainder of the variables affiliated with the theme, personal values. The questions asked if students perceived that instructors thought they could be successful at Century College, and cared about their thoughts and perspectives, with all the mean averages of the "belong" group being between "strongly agree" and "agree". The greatest statistical difference was in question 15, "my instructors know my academic goals", with the belong group at a mean of 2.07 (*SD* = 1.054) between "agree" and "somewhat agree" and the does not belong group's mean at 5.23 (*SD* = 2.048) between "somewhat disagree" and "disagree". The statistical difference in question 15 had a p-value of less than .001 indicating there was less than a .1% chance that the data between the two groups could have been the same (see table 11 for the significance value for all of the questions).

Table 11

Theme 1 t-Test Results for Bivariate of Belonging

	Mean (Agree) Freq. = 104	Std.Dev	Mean (Disagree) Freq.= 13	Std.Dev	t Stat	df	p (two-tailed)
1. My instructors	2.37	1.191	3.62	2.256	-1.964	12.849	.072

	Mean (Agree) Freq. = 104	Std.Dev	Mean (Disagree) Freq.= 13	Std.Dev	t Stat	df	p (two-tailed)
know my name							
3. My instructors respect me	1.56	.680	1.62	1.044	-.194	13.303	.849
4. My instructors believe I can be successful at Century College	1.55	.709	3.69	1.797	-4.260	12.471	.001
6. My instructors care about my thoughts and perspective	1.62	.728	3.77	1.922	-4.006	12.434	.002
15. My instructors know my academic goals	2.07	1.054	5.23	2.048	-5.481	12.807	<.001
Total	1.83	.330	3.58	1.150			

Note: n=141

Theme 2: In-Class Experiences

Qualitative Data

In-class experiences are arguably the most critical as they are the only ones that are

required for students. Students are not typically expected to interact with instructors outside of

class time nor join extracurricular activities, especially in a community college where over half

the students are part-time, presumably for work or other personal obligations. Pa spoke of in-

class experiences saying if she were in a place she belonged, "I would feel confident and I would be able to ask for help without feeling like my questions are "dumb" or that I will be looked at as not smart for not already knowing the answer." This is an example of emotional safety, she should feel comfortable making mistakes and learning from them without adverse responses. Pa also continues to discuss the importance of respect in the classroom, and ensuring that instructors foster an environment where, "with a group and we can easily converse, work well together, and support each other in any way."

Table 12 shows the responses from the participants as it relates to in-class experiences. This question did not explicitly ask about this in Question 1 of the open-ended survey, the researcher found that the participants seemed to understand what the study was focused on and some did relate it back to the classroom or institution as a whole.

Table 12

Open-Ended Survey Question 1 for Theme 2

Coding Categories	Participant's Responses
Emotional Safety	Pao: *"I will be looked at as not smart for not already knowing the answer"*
	Sue: *"I can learn and experience new things, learning new thing everyday"*

Note. Pseudonyms were given to encourage a storytelling narrative from an anonymous survey

In sharing experiences that contributed to feeling like they belonged, Pa discussed her in class experience recalling, "Class days are usually very quick, and we tend to learn multiple things in one class. I like to believe that most of my classmates, instructors, and I work well together." This discusses the respect among herself, her classmates, and the instructor to learn and complete many tasks in a short amount of time. Keng reflected on his time as the only male

in his cohort saying, "I feel like the instructors at Century go out of their way to make sure all

students feel part of the class regardless of gender, race, age or religion." This inclusive

classroom environment would help create emotional safety for students. Table 13 shows

additional responses that speak to experiences of belonging in both categories of respect and

emotional safety in the classroom.

Table 13

Open-Ended Survey Question 2 for Theme 2

Coding Categories	Participant's Responses
Respect	Pao: "M*y instructor not only taught the material in an understandable method but he individually and patiently tended to each student's questions. Although I did just fine throughout the course and interacted with my instructor seldomly, watching how he treated his students was no different in how he treated me. A very kind man with the humor and enthusiasm to teach those who want to learn*."
Emotional Safety	Linda: "*They always kindly explain and demonstrate things for me and follow up to make sure that they have answered my question in a manner that I understood."*

Note. Pseudonyms were given to encourage a storytelling narrative from an anonymous survey

In response to the question of experiences when the participants did not feel like they

belonged in the classroom, Pa wrote about respect,

"Being one of the few Asian students in my cohort, I do tend to pay more attention to

how instructors interact with American students vs. Asian students. I noticed that this

instructor would quickly and thoroughly help the American students but when I or

another Asian classmate asked, we were sometimes met with a long pause, audible loud

sigh, or even a look that almost spoke 'why don't you know this'."

Song also shared that in class, "Sometimes it was an obvious answer that I just forgot about but it

made me feel like the instructor did not want to help me and I did hesitate to ask after those

incidents." Table 14 further details the experiences of students' not belonging in the classroom.

Table 14

Open-Ended Survey Question 3 for Theme 2

Coding Categories	Participant's Responses
Respect	Joua: *"When I had to do a group project with some classmates and our instructor told us we could pick the people in the group and unfortunately nobody wanted me in their group."*

Note. Pseudonyms were given to encourage a storytelling narrative from an anonymous survey

Recommendations for things that can be done in the classroom to promote belonging

were discussed in question 4 of the open-ended survey (See Appendix F). Table 15 shows the

responses from the participants.

Table 15

Open-Ended Survey Question 4 for Theme 2

Coding Categories	Participant's Responses
Respect	Song: *"Be engaged and make sure students are as well"*
	Linda: "*Individually interact with their student rather than "the whole class"*
	Pao: *"If they have questions, be the one to prep an answer, know it or not."*

Coding Categories	Participant's Responses
Emotional Safety	Pa: *"Simply helping every student the same. Even if they had asked the same question that someone else just did, I understand that repeating yourself gets annoying but give the answer the same effort like they did to the last student that asked the question"*

Note. Pseudonyms were given to encourage a storytelling narrative from an anonymous survey

Quantitative Data

The quantitative questionnaire with variables associated with in-class experiences were question numbers 5, 7, 8, 9, and 11 (Appendix E). This included instructor believing they had the ability to complete the coursework, interactions during class, encouraging participation, valuing the student's presence in class, and feeling comfortable raising their hand.

The data indicated that the belong group's in-class experiences were generally between "strongly agree" and "agree" ($M = 1.28$, $SD = .264$), while the does not belong group was between "somewhat agree" and "neither agree or disagree" ($M = 3.55$, $SD = .434$). There are significant statistical differences between the groups in all the categories. The greatest difference among the two groups being question 8, "My instructors encourage my participation in class discussion" (t (12.561) = -3.964, $p = .002$), while the most similar was still significantly different with question 7, "My instructors interact with me during class." (t (12.679) = -3-128, $p = .007$) (see table 16 for the significance value for each of the categories).

Table 16

Theme 2 t-Test Results for Bivariate of Belonging

	Mean (Agree) Freq. =104	Std.Dev	Mean (Disagree) Freq.=13	Std.Dev	t Stat	df	p (two-tailed)
5. My instructors believe I have the ability to complete the assigned coursework	1.65	.604	3.54	2.222	-3.045	12.222	.010
7. My instructors interact with me during class.	2.04	1.061	4.08	2.253	-3.128	12.673	.007
8. My instructors encourage my participation in class discussion	1.56	.798	3.62	1.850	-3.964	12.564	.002
9. My instructors value my presence in class	1.63	.778	2.77	1.481	-2.739	12.841	.017
11. I feel comfortable raising my hand in class to ask a question	2.23	1.225	3.77	2.088	-2.601	13.051	.022
Total	1.82	.264	3.55	.434			

Note: n=141

Theme 3: Out-of-Class Experiences

Qualitative Data

Arguably one of the most important factors in retention and persistence by Tinto's model and several other sources, brings light to theme 3: out-of-classroom experiences. In answering question 1 of the open-ended survey, participants focused more on the whole college community experience, but as stated in Theme 1, this was a calibration question, with the preceding questions being specific to faculty practices and class experiences.

Pao responded that, "When alone, I may "stand out" in some cases but I should not be considered a "sore thumb" when doing so" with the need to be respected and not judged for standing out. Whereas Sue discussed the emotional aspect of out-of-class experiences responding, "It means I can make new friends instead of being afraid," touching on the emotional safety of putting herself in a vulnerable situation by trying to make friends with someone she doesn't know. Ma also adds to this category by saying, "It means I can feel free, comfortable, confident and happy" (pseudonyms were used to identify the participants of the anonymous survey).

In response to question 2 (Appendix F), the participants discussed how instructors made them feel like they belonged outside of the classroom (see table 17 for the categorized responses from the participants).

Table 17

Open-Ended Survey Question 2 for Theme 3

Coding Categories	Participant's Responses
Respect	Sue: *"They look like friends, I can feel their warmth and enthusiasm towards the students."*

	Joua: *"I guess seeing people who I knew and saw that there where other people who were the same race and nationality as me."*
Emotional Safety	Ma: *"I love all my professors at Century College, because they are really nice and willing to help me anytime I need them"*

Note. Pseudonyms were given to encourage a storytelling narrative from an anonymous survey

For question 3 (see Appendix F) Keng shared a story about his experience on an internship set up by the school to complete graduation requirements,

"While on internship I would notice some patients would look at me uncertainly when meeting me until I began speaking, because they were probably unsure if I was a fluent English speaker or a foreigner (which I of course am, so I can't blame them for their confusion)."

In the context of the greater college community, Pao wrote,

"I never understood the idea of "getting involved" or "hanging out" or "extracurricular activities" in school. So whenever I walk down the corridors and see people lounging about and talking and laughing, I just didn't get it. I didn't belong there."

Table 18 further shows the out-of-class experience and the feeling of not belonging.

Table 18

Open-Ended Survey Question 3 for Theme 3

Coding Categories	Participant's Responses
Respect	Song: *"wandering alone, wearing what I wore at the time, led to some stares and double takes but that was about it."*

Note. Pseudonyms were given to encourage a storytelling narrative from an anonymous survey

Question 4 of the open-ended survey (see Appendix F) asks the students about what they perceive is important for instructors to do for belonging (see table 19 for participant responses).

Table 19

Open-Ended Survey Question 4 for Theme 3

Coding Categories	Participant's Responses
Respect	Pao: "*Greeting while calling the student's name are enough, I think. That individual will open up whether it's internal or external reaction.*"
Emotional Safety	Joua: *"Checking in on the student and see how they're doing."*

Note. Pseudonyms were given to encourage a storytelling narrative from an anonymous survey

Quantitative Data

Out-of-Class experiences included questions 2, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 17 from the Qualtrics questionnaire (Appendix E). These questions comprised of instructors acknowledging students outside of the classroom, comfort emailing or speaking to the instructor outside of class, feeling like the instructor is approachable, knowing how to get help on coursework, and if instructors attend the cultural events that the students do.

The overall mean of the variables for the belong group was 1.87 (*SD* = .544) indicating for out-of-class interactions they were between "agree" and "strongly agree". The does not belong group was nearer to "neither agree or disagree" at a mean of 3.57 (*SD* = .531). The greatest significant statistical difference in theme 3 was question 10, "I feel comfortable emailing my instructor when I have a question" (t (12.259) = -3.914, p = .002), while the only question that was not found to be statistically different in this group was question 2, "My instructors

acknowledge me when I see them outside of class" (t (13.410) = -1.577, p = .138) (see p-value in

Table 20 for all statistical significance).

Table 20

Theme 3 t-Test Results for Bivariate of Belonging

	Mean (Agree) Freq.=104	Std.Dev	Mean (Disagree) Freq. = 13	Std.Dev	t Stat	df	p (two-tailed)
2. My instructors acknowledge me when I see them outside of class	2.96	1.564	4.00	2.309	-1.577	13.410	.138
10. I feel comfortable emailing my instructor when I have a question	1.54	.682	4.08	2.326	-3.914	12.259	.002
12. I feel comfortable speaking to my instructor before or after class	1.65	.868	3.23	2.088	-2.694	12.523	.019
13. I feel my instructor is approachable	1.56	.748	2.69	1.702	-2.375	12.586	.034
14. I know how to get help on coursework when I need it	1.67	.717	3.85	2.154	-3.612	12.334	.003
Total	1.87	.544	3.57	.531			

Note. n=141

The participants were asked if they attended cultural events and their perception of instructors attending cultural events (see Table 21).

Table 21

Frequency and Percent of Likert-Scale Question 17

Have you or would you participate in campus cultural events?	Frequency Students	Percent Students	Frequency Faculty attendance	Percent Faculty attendance
Declined to respond	4	2.8		
No	93	66	17	22
Yes	44	31.2	31	12
Neither Agree nor Disagree			93	66
Total	141			

Summary of Findings

Chapter 4 discussed the findings of the data and analysis to identify the themes, categories, and statistically different factors. It demonstrates consistency with the grounded theory methodology through constant comparative methods of the data. There were 141 participants in the qualitative questionnaire with 8 completing the open-ended question survey. Both tools were structured to find the factors of sense of belonging in relation to faculty practices. The data collected, help to inform about a limited population at a specific college. The participants were made up of mostly Hmong students who were in the traditional college age group. Most of the students identified as feeling that they belonged. The quantitative findings indicated those factors that have been found in the literature to be most influential on sense of

belonging. The qualitative responses provide a narrative that added another dimension to those initial responses in the questionnaire.

The research question was "Which faculty practices do SEAA students perceive as influential to their sense of belonging to their community college?" Respect and emotional safety were the coding categories within each of the themes as identified by the open-ended questionnaire responses. The factors that were found to have the most statistical difference are the ones that have the most impact. The discussion for how the researcher came to this decision will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Personal values factors that were perceived to have the most impact on sense of belonging was freedom for self-expression. This included participants' physical appearance, along with personal beliefs and being treated equally. It also includes being comfortable with who they are and fitting in. The factors that encompass these desires were faculty respecting the students, believing in the students, caring about their thoughts and perspectives, and knowing their academic goals.

In-class experiences affecting sense of belonging of the participants included feeling like they were not smart enough. They wanted to feel comfortable learning new things without feeling judged for misinterpreted. They wrote of instructors who made them feel like they could ask questions and not be put down for not knowing the information. Another factor that was important was individual attention during class time and helping each student with the same amount of care. This ties into the quantitative data of most significance being the instructors encouraging their participation in class, interacting with the student in class, and believing that the student can do the work.

Out-of-class experiences data has the most discrepancies among those who belong and those who don't. Identified as a key factor for persisting, participants discussed the difficulty of making friends, fitting in, and joining extracurricular activities. Having people who were of the same race and nationality, as well has having instructors who treated them as closely as friends did make a difference in those experiences. Theme 3 was identified as the most significant statistically different scores between those who belonged and did not belong. These factors included acknowledging out of class, comfort emailing the instructor or talking to them outside of class, feeling that the instructor is approachable, where to get help when needed, and that the instructors attend the cultural events the students do.

Through examining the data along with existing literature, the researcher found that the lower attainment of education degrees could be explained through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. While there are criticisms to Maslow's work, with the lack of culture and environment taken into account, in general it can help illustrate why a privilege like higher education would not be top priority in regard to human needs (Kellerman, 2014). The hierarchy of human needs based on the SEAA population as a monolithic culture, which we know is not true, paints a picture for basic understanding of why SEAA students are not achieving at the same level as other Asian groups and why historical context, reasons for migration, socioeconomic, and race as a social construct are important (see Figure 7). It contains information from the literature review along with data collected during the study.

The theory developed was the Theory of Secure Interactions. Security is defined as being "free from danger or harm" or to "make safe," while interactions is defined as "reciprocal action, effect, or influence" (HarperCollins, 2012). Interactions can refer to those verbal or non-verbal between faculty but also the surrounding environment. Therefore, the theory is used to describe

the interactions in a capacity that the student considers secure. It captures students' perceptions of most influential faculty practices on sense of belonging. This is found to be is multi-dimensional. It consists of faculty practices inside and outside of the classroom, with outside of the classroom separated into curriculum-based and personal interactions. It also is based on two identified categories, (1) respect and (2) emotional safety. These can be categorized on levels 2, 3, and 4 on Figure 7.

Figure 7

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs for SEAA Students
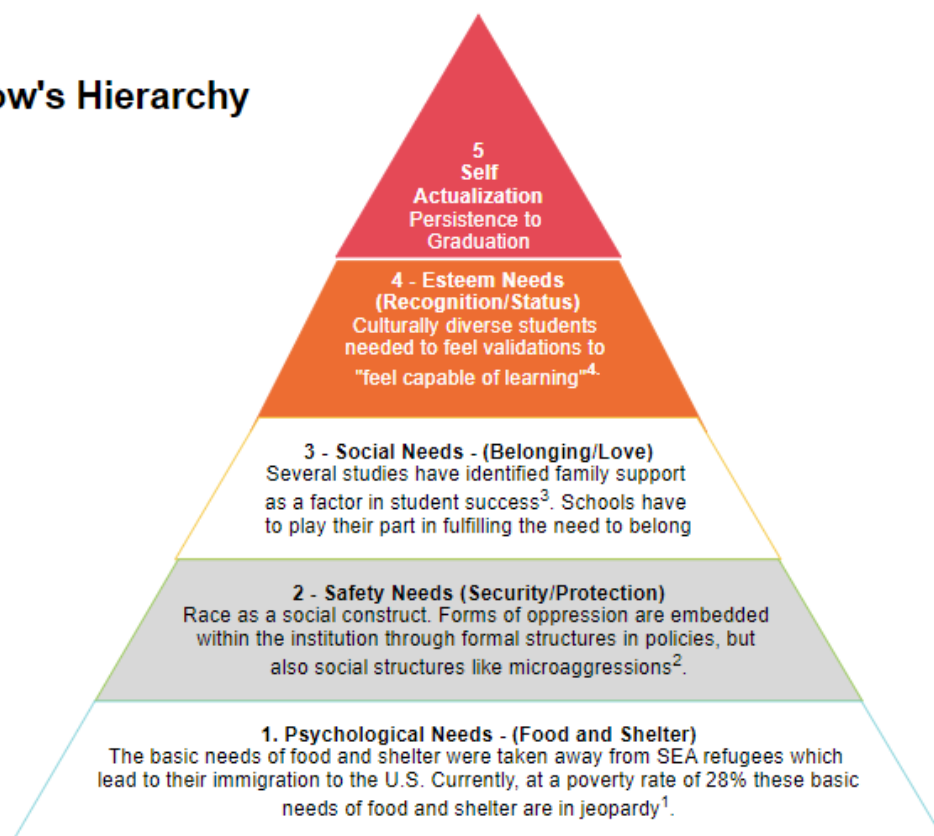
Note. This hierarchy of needs is based on performance in higher education with "self-actualization" being the highest level of attainment or graduation. It starts with basic level needs that is not always provided by the institution, but could be, then moves into social constructs, sense of belonging, and encouragement and validation. All the remaining levels can be provided by the institution through intentional training. [1] (Her, 2014), [2] (Pak, et al, 2021), [3] (Maramba & Palmer, 2014), [4] (Garza, et al., 2021).

Chapter 5 will look at the data further to interpret the results of the study and creating meaning of the data. The researcher will also discuss the limitations and implications of the study and make recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5.

Southeast Asian American (SEAA) students have been historically grouped in with all identified "Asian" ethnicities. "Asian" according to the 2010 U.S. Census defines as people of the Far East, Southeast Asian, or the Indian subcontinent, including Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam (Pak, et al., 2014, p. 6). This has been a disservice as SEAAs when looking at statistics such as college degree attainment. For example, only 27 percent of Hmong Americans have a high school degree, 11.7 percent have a two- or four-year degree, and 1.5 percent with graduate degrees. In comparison to the overall national averages of 49.7 percent with a high school degree, 21.9 percent with a two- or four-year degree, and 8.9 percent with graduate degrees, respectively (Xiong & Lam, 2012). Comprehensive Asian student data show attainment levels as higher than the national level; therefore, there is a need to disaggregate the data.

SEAAs are recognized as immigrating in two waves, the first being Vietnamese professionals in the first wave between 1975 and 1982, and the second wave with Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese refugees after 1982 (Museus, 2013). English proficiency and socioeconomic status have been at the forefront of why SEAAs did not have the same success in education as other ethnic Asian groups. Most SEAAs are refugees, coming after the Vietnam War. Their resettlement was not out of desire, but out of necessity to escape dangerous conditions, leaving families with trauma and little knowledge of the new dominant culture (Her, 2014).

Currently, it is worth discussing that not all SEAAs enrolling in higher education are refugees. Since the majority of the populations immigrated over between the mid 1970's and early 1980's it is safe to presume that most students are first- or even second-generation

Americans. This does not take away, however, the historical trauma in play and the lack of experience navigating the higher education system. That is why cultural navigators, as a theoretical framework, is critical in this study. It necessitates viewing success through the lens of a community and providing assistance to those items that are missing, such as navigating policies or education about microaggressions for student success.

This study examined how faculty can contribute to levels 2, 3 and 4 of the SEAA hierarchy of needs to help students persist to graduation (Figure 7). It dove into the perceptions of faculty practices that students found most impactful. This chapter includes the summary of the results combining both he qualitative and quantitative data, discussion of the results, conclusions based on the results, interpretation of the findings, limitations, implications of the study, and recommendations for future research. This is the final chapter of the dissertation.

Summary and Discussion of the Results

This study addressed three main factors in the success of SEAA students to answer the research question. First, the systemic racism of institutions, the exclusionary language and policies that prohibit those not of the dominant culture to struggle to navigate. SEAA students, as first- and second-generation students do not have the historical knowledge of higher education help from immediate family or relatives readily available. Secondly, the role of faculty in creating a sense of belonging to the institution. Acting as cultural navigators and providing the support and encouragement literature has discussed as instrumental in belonging. Lastly, identifying the specific faculty practices that impact the students' sense of belonging. Student-faculty relationships are the only in higher education that are required, therefore should be the most critical to maintain. All these factors are intertwined in one another, and therefore could be

seen as one factor with different layers at the institution level, the college community level, and in-class.

The researcher sought to find the answer to the research question:

RQ: Which faculty practices do SEAA students perceive as influential to their sense of belonging to their community college?

The framework used was Tinto's theory of academic and social integration model of institutional departure (1993) and cultural navigators (Strayhorn, 2014). Tinto's theory put the responsibility of persistence into the hands of the students, while Strayhorn expresses the significance of leaders to support students in navigating the properties of academic and social systems.

In this mixed methods, grounded theory study, constant comparative method with line by line open coding was utilized to analyze the data and identify the three themes. (1) Personal values including in and out of class experiences, (2) course based in class experiences, and (3) curriculum-based out-of-class experiences. The two categories within these themes were identified as respect and emotional safety. The Theory of Secure Interactions discusses the stories of SEAA students in the classroom and their experiences with faculty on sense of belonging. Each of these factors was discussed by combining the responses from the quantitative questionnaire and student experiences shared in the qualitative open-ended survey. There were 141 respondents for the quantitative portion and eight for the qualitative questions.

In analyzing the data, the researcher put most weight on those values that were of statistically significant difference. She chose to do this because it shows that those who feel they belong rate both the action and their sense of belonging positively, with agreement that the action was taking place, while those who had lower levels of belonging and rated the action negatively,

indicated that it does not happen often or at all. They included 12 of the 15 questions assessed in each of the three themes.

In theme one, three of the five questions were found to be significantly different between the two groups. My instructors believe I can be successful at Century College, care about my thoughts and perspectives, and know my academic goals. Theme two questions were all found to be statistically different. In-class experience questions from theme 2 were: my instructors interact with me during class, encourage my participation in class discussion, value my presence in class, and I feel comfortable raising my hand in class to ask a question. Four of the five theme three questions about out-of-class experiences were statistically different: I feel comfortable emailing my instructor when I have a question, speaking to my instructor before or after class, my instructor is approachable, and I know how to get help on coursework when I need it.

Personal Values

Positive interactions with faculty are at the core of how faculty can influence student persistence. Communicating encouraging messages and engagement outside of the classroom was found as a factor in positive interactions (Xiong, et al., 2020). In the category of respect, students were asked if they perceived their instructors respected them, believed they could be successful, and knew their academic goals. Those who belonged agreed that their instructors did while those who did not felt indifferent, that they neither agreed nor disagreed that their instructors did.

Participants stressed the importance of being addressed by their name and treated the same as everyone else as signs of respect. A student attributed respect with the instructor remembering the name of her child, she felt it showed that the instructor cared for her outside of classroom curriculum. This was impactful for the student and one of the reasons they indicated

such a high level of belonging. They identified knowing personal dates and other personal information as an important factor all faculty should practice with students.

Another student indicated their personal experiences with faculty were neither "supremely bad but nothing exceptionally good either." This was interpreted as the student not being engaged with the faculty. Literature shows that student's engagement with faculty and other cultural navigators enhance the understanding of campus culture and expectations of the course (Xiong & Wood, 2020). So, while the student did not identify the experience as "bad" there was nothing good to share about the interactions, the faculty did not know their educational goals, nor made the student feel like they could be successful. Therefore, faculty has failed at their job as a cultural navigator and source of support for the student.

Emotional safety was identified as a category that had an impact on faculty interactions on personal values. Several participants stressed the importance of not feeling like an outsider and the desire to be treated the same as everyone else. One mentioned age as a reason she felt out of place, another mentioned not being treated differently because she was not "White". These are the struggles of being of an outside culture, the microaggressions that can go unnoticed build up and show up as insecurity or fear of being on the outside. Kwan (2015) explained that "subtle insults or put-downs that result from aggressors' overt or covert" establish a sense of superiority. These experiences can negatively affect their attitudes about schooling and faculty-student relationships (p.23). This is especially true when it happens either by the faculty, or by other students in front of the faculty without being called out.

Emotional safety is also very important for those who have English as a second language, such as the participant who recently came from a refugee camp. Her perception was that she did not speak English to the level of other students and wondered if she had what it takes. This

coincides with the neutral rating of those who do not belong that did not agree nor disagree that their instructor believed they could be successful. Words of affirmation and praise and knowing the students' academic goals creates a sense of trust and a bridge so the instructor could help with feedback in response to knowing the student's struggles and also supporting where they want to go in academics.

While there were some negative or neutral experiences, some students indicated that faculty were some of their greatest supporters in motivating them to be successful. This student would feel like instructors knew her personal goals and that they believed she could be successful at Century College. Another student indicated that even though he was the only male in his cohort, the instructors made him feel comfortable. These students have had positive interactions with faculty and would have a better chance of navigating the system to graduation, they know where to get support and have someone that knows their goals and values.

In-Class Experiences

Among the students who felt they belonged and those who did not, there was significant statistical differences for all questions relating to in-class experiences. Those who felt they belonged, rated highly for each of the categories, while those who did not, rated it in the neutral category, that teachers interact with them during class. The other questions were encouraging participation in discussions, value presence in class, and feeling comfortable raising their hand in class.

Working well together was an aspect of discussion, one student indicated the fast pace of the class was easier when the faculty and other students were cohesive. While another student shared a time when a group project was assigned but no one wanted to be in her group. This

experience could damage the student's emotional safety because the classroom was no longer seen as a comfortable space. It was a space that excludes and embarrasses.

This negative sentiment was echoed by other participants writing they desired an environment that they can ask questions without feeling "dumb". They go on to explain that even if it is something they have learned before; they may have just forgotten in that situation. Negative reactions, such as "a long pause, audible loud sigh, or even a look that almost spoke 'why don't you know this?'" from instructors also builds on a space that is not emotionally safe. This experience negatively impacts all aspects of the in-class factors, including comfort asking question and feeling like they are valued in class.

Another student reflected on an instructor fondly, calling him a kind man for teaching in a clear way, but also giving individual attention to students as they asked questions. He treated everyone the same, even when it was someone like the participant who did not have much interaction with him. This faculty created an environment of trust and security. The student was comfortable to ask questions, make mistakes, and learn the material.

The student who identified himself as the only male in his cohort, also went on to elaborate that he felt the instructors included everyone regardless of background. It was important for students to feel like they could ask question and get a clear, concise answer without feeling like they were thoughtless. An instructor who is patient, kind, and follows up to make sure the student understood the material is showing that they care and want the student to be successful. Validating messages, especially when a student feels vulnerable, and even more so when it is in a classroom environment, is incredibly impactful for sense of belonging (Xiong, Lor, Lorchueya, 2020).

Out of Class Experiences

Out-of-class experiences were found to have statistical differences between the two groups as well. The reason could be in the fact that students are not necessarily required to have interactions outside of class time. Faculty are obligated to hold office hours, reach out if a student is performing poorly, but students can simply choose not to attend or respond. This may be why the group who belonged rated all of these factors as "agree" to" strongly agree" while the group who did not feel they belonged rated most of the questions as closer to "neutral" then "somewhat agree." Of both groups, instructors acknowledging them outside of the classroom was rated the lowest of all of the questions, aside from whether or not instructors attend cultural events.

Most of the participants stories of not belonging were based more on their perception of how others, not necessarily instructors, viewed them. One student wrote of their clothes that was met with staring, while another expressed their discomfort walking down the hall and seeing groups of people just hanging out, talking, and laughing. This student viewed school as a place to learn skills and discipline was what another participant described for the classroom. They did not see it as a place to make friends and found it difficult to make friends because of responsibilities outside of school. This could be based on the high statistics of students who work over 30 hours outside of the school, but this could also be a reflection on relationships with faculty and other staff.

One student recalled an incident while on school-sanctioned internship that patients would be uncertain when meeting because of his ethnicity. He continues that they likely thought he was a foreigner, and finishes with "which of course I am, so I can't blame them for their confusion". This is the type of microaggression that gets engrained in the culture and in the

identity of students of color. They make excuses for how people treat them and ignore their own feelings of hurt or marginalization. These incidents result in "negative feelings of self-doubt, frustration, and isolation" (Kwan, 2015, p.81).

"They look like friends" a participant wrote about the faculty; she spoke of their warmth and enthusiasm toward the students. Another talks about being able to feel free to be who she is, happy, and confident. Making friends and interacting with faculty outside of the classroom creates a relationship that is stronger and promotes achievement.

Cultural Events

Cultural events, clubs, and associations have been identified as important in students feeling like they can successfully navigate the higher education system. An environment where a students' cultural background is promoted and celebrated can lead to a greater sense of belonging (Museus, et al., 2016). Some students spoke to this that they felt most like they belonged when they saw people who reflected them. Those who shared the same race and nationality, it establishes a sense of unity, that they aren't the only one like them. Xiong, Lor, and Lorchueya (2020) report that SEAA male students who are more comfortable with their ethnic identities often were more likely to engage with faculty. The question of whether faculty attended cultural events was the lowest rated among both groups of belonging. Both groups responded at the neutral and disagree levels. If cultural events are identified as a piece that could promote success, faculty should be in support of it, not only by giving verbal support, but by attending the events as well.

Recommendations

There are many faculty practices that are identified as influential based on students' perceptions. The responses of the questions indicate that 14 of the 16 questions were of

significant statistical difference, therefore showing that both the groups of belonging rated them significantly different in their perception of it happening. This finding was in line with the research discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, that those who felt more engagement were likely to feel more of a sense of belonging. Sense of belonging is currently being studied at a higher rate to find its connection to retention and graduation, it is believed to be a factor of success. There are several recommendations for faculty based on the findings of this study.

(1) A personal professional relationship with students with genuine interest can make a difference in how the student feels about faculty in the classroom. Remembering important dates, upcoming events that students share, or family members' names are all ways faculty can show they care. When students open-up by revealing personal information, it is important that faculty take the time to listen and validate the student.

(2) It is also important to provide students with one-on-one attention, even within a larger classroom. This provides the individual interaction that will help foster more sense of belonging. It includes patiently answering questions in a way that does not single a student out, and then following up with the student to confirm understanding. When giving the individual attention, ensuring that all students are treated the same is something some participants indicated as most important practices. To provide out of class one-on-one connections, office hours that are scheduled right before or after classes will often have more attendance as students would not have to make a separate trip for it.

(3) There needs to be more accountability on faculty to foster a sense of belonging in their classroom. While it is true, there are many types of personalities and each instructor will not reach all students, even one meaningful relationship with a faculty member can make a difference. All faculty should strive to provide a welcoming environment for their students by

understanding they are learning and may forget or process things more slowly. As one participant stated, "everyone blooms at their own pace." Students can feel warmth and enthusiasm from instructors, so having a true passion for education and student success is something that must be genuine. Encouraging, motivating, and supporting students, especially when they are struggling could be the push they need to persist.

(4) Cultural navigators should be prevalent and relevant in the greater college community. In doing research on cultural navigators, the researcher found that there were many institutions that had already adopted this model and proudly displays it on their admissions and advising pages. This shows what the school values and that they are putting careful consideration to help guide marginalized students onto a successful path. Each institution needs to "put their money where their mouth is" and provide trainings for staff and faculty on being a cultural navigator or similar support frameworks.

Faculty are the most natural to fall into the cultural navigator's role because, as stated before, they are the only person students are required to interact with. This role does not have to mean seeing the student from start to end, it could also include personally connecting a student with staff who can provide that support. Taking five minutes at the beginning of the semester with a survey to learn students' goals and struggles could help the instructor understand what the student may experience throughout the course. When the lines of communication open, even with just a short questionnaire, students are more likely to seek help when needed.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this mixed methods study. First, the sample came from one institution in the Midwest and had a high number of Hmong students at 84 percent, with the rest being a spread of other identified SEAA ethnicities. Along with this the low number of

participants make this study not generalizable to the greater SEAA population. Second, employing a true quan → QUAL research would have made for richer responses from participants. Analyzing the quantitative data for trends, then using those trends to hold focus groups would have been ideal. The researcher could have asked follow-up questions for clarification. Focus groups were planned initially for the study but did not happen due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There were fewer students on campus, participating in clubs, along with hardships in their personal lives, that participating in an optional focus group was not top priority. Third, if doing an open-ended survey, it would be advisable to do a pilot of the survey with those who understand the concept of sense of belonging. Therefore, the researcher can ensure the questions are interpreted how they intend. Fourth, this study focuses on the growing literature that establishes that sense of belonging could be a factor in persistence to graduation, this is the assumption in the questions, and hoped to add to the literature. The study, however, identified for the student the current practices that are already in the literature to find which students found most impactful. A different scale, perhaps a ranking system, would have made for richer information about their perceptions on importance. Fifth, the researcher is of SEAA ethnicity and is a faculty member. The experiences as both a student in the classroom and the feeling of not belonging, along with the self-doubt as a faculty member when reading the responses were things that she had to cast to the side. Even still, her experiences and interpretations could have shaped the analysis of the data.

Recommendations for Further Research

There are several ways to move forward from this study. This study could have been more focused with either student-faculty interaction with SEAA students or just sense of belonging. This may be a good steppingstone to continue this research with this group of

students and location to dive deeper into each. Perhaps, having more than one research question and instead of two separate studies, ask two separate questions, one about student-faculty interactions and the other about sense of belonging, this could also have offered a more nuanced understanding of sense of belonging with faculty among SEAA students.

Another recommendation for future research is to further disaggregate the demographic data. This study only touched on age and credits completed, while there is growing research that SEAA male students have a much different experience than female students, including dropout rates (Xiong, Lor, Lorchueya., 2020). This would provide for more targeted data that could be used to promote recommendations for practice.

Conclusion

This mixed-methods, grounded research study sought to find the faculty practices SEAA students most attributed to their sense of belonging. The participants were current or past students of a mid-sized community and technical college in a suburb of Minnesota. The study utilized a 7-point Likert scale questionnaire to gauge how often students perceived the faculty performed several practices identified by the CCSM (2018) as testing for sense of belonging. Then a four-question open-ended survey was sent to students who identified interest in a focus group after those students ultimately declined participation in the focus group.

The study was employed through the framework of Tinto's theory of academic and social integration model of institutional departure (1993) to and Strayhorn's (2014) cultural navigators. This brought together the accountability of the student and their role in their education, while also remembering that the institution has a responsibility for these students' success as well. Both models also acknowledge that student success not only happens in the classroom through academic systems, but also through social systems, including those with peers, staff, and faculty.

Therefore, the study identified the three realms of interaction as in-class academic related, out-of-class academic related, and interactions that have impact on the personal values of the student.

The study found that the students who felt they belonged, had more experiences of faculty engaging in those practices identified by the CCSM (2018) as influencing sense of belonging, while those who identified as not belonging having not experienced them as often. This is not surprising as the research has indicated those practices. Now with these recommendations of practice and moving forward through this study, changes need to be implemented.

The institution where this study was employed should recognize and identify areas that need improvement, especially in training for cultural navigators. Out-of-class engagement with faculty was the lowest rated in the study by both groups of belonging, so developing and strengthening relationships between student groups, community activities, and faculty will be important in changing the landscape for SEAA students and other marginalized groups in the future. Until there are equitable practices in the education system, comparable graduation rates among SEAA students and their White counterparts, and increased retention in these students, the fight for understanding and transformation does not stop.

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Appendix A: NIH Certificate of Completion

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Pamela Yang** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants."

Date of Completion: 09/05/2018

Certification Number: 2898527

NIH National Institutes of Health
Office of Extramural Research

Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

Institutional Review Board   MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY **MOORHEAD**

DATE: November 8, 2019

TO: Renee Harmon, Principal Investigator
                      Pamela Yang, Co-Investigator

FROM: Lisa Karch, Chair
                      Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB

ACTION: **DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS**

PROJECT TITLE: [1488618-1] Southeast Asian American Students? Perceptions on Influential
                      Faculty Practices on Belonging at a Community College
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
DECISION DATE: October 31, 2019

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Minnesota State University
Moorhead IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal
regulations under 45 CFR 46.104.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB. Please include
your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been issued in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within
Minnesota State University Moorhead's records.

Appendix C: Institutional Permission Letter

CENTURY
COLLEGE

October 27, 2020

Pamela Yang
Century College
3300 Century Avenue North
White Bear Lake, MN 55110

Re: Southeast Asian American Students? Perceptions on Influential Faculty Practices on Belonging at a Community College

Dear Ms. Yang,

The Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Century College has reviewed your request to extend your IRB approval for another year related to the project noted above. Your approval to conduct research related to this project will be extended until October 27, 2021. Should your research extend beyond this date and/or change from what you submitted to the Board, you must reapply for approval.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Recoverable Signature

X _Nichole Petersen_

Nichole Petersen

Signed by: cd985e56-8375-4704-8daa-14792a6a1509

Nichole Petersen
Dean of Institutional Effectiveness

Appendix D: Consent for Participation

Informed Consent to Participate in Study

You are invited to participate in a study to find which faculty practices Southeast Asian American students perceive as most important to their sense of belonging at a community college. I hope to learn how faculty influence students' sense of belonging to encourage persistence and retention in Southeast Asian American students. You were selected as a possible participant because you have been identified as a Southeast Asian American student who has regular contact with faculty.

If you decide to participate, you will complete an anonymous survey consisting of demographic questions, likert-scale questions, and open-ended questions. At the end of the anonymous survey, I will invite you to participate in a one-on-one in-person interview lasting 30 minutes, or a focus group of up to 10 other students lasting one (1) hour long. Interviews and focus groups will take place on campus.

The contact information shared will be kept confidential with all responses remaining anonymous. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relationship with Century College. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time.

Please feel free to ask questions regarding this study. You may contact me, Pamela Yang, if you have any additional questions at 651-338-9145 and yangpam@mnstate.edu. Any questions about your rights may be directed to Dr. Lisa I. Karch, Chair of the MSUM Institutional Review Board, at 218-477-2699 or by email at: irb@mnstate.edu.

You will be offered a copy of this form to download and keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Proceeding to the survey indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time beginning the survey should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Investigator   Date

Appendix E: Quantitative Questionnaire on Sense of Belonging

Southeast Asian American Students' Perceptions on Influential Faculty Practices on

Belonging at a Community College

Thank you for choosing to participate in this survey. Your responses will be an important part of identifying what faculty can do to create a greater sense of belonging for Southeast Asian American students at Century Community and Technical College. Answer the questions to the best of your ability keeping your personal experiences in mind. Please complete this survey by (date).

Section 1: Demographics

Answer the following questions about yourself.

1. Are you a first-generation college student? (Yes, No)
2. What is your age? (Select from Drop-down)
3. What is your ethnicity?
   □ Cambodian

   □ Hmong

   □ Lao

   □ Thai

   □ Vietnamese

   □ Other_____

4. How many college credits have you successfully completed?
   □ None (0)

   □ 1-8

   □ 9-12

   □ 13-16

   □ 17+

5. Do you participate in campus cultural events? (Yes, No)
    a. If yes, please describe the events you have attended.

Section 2: Sense of Belonging

Please consider your experiences with your instructors and rate your level of agreement of the statements below with: *strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, I don't know, somewhat disagree, disagree,* and *strongly disagree*

1. My instructors know my name.

2. My instructors acknowledge me when I see them outside of class.

3. My instructors respect me.

4. My instructors believe I can be successful at Century Community and Technical College.

5. My instructors believe I have the ability to complete the assigned coursework.

6. My instructors care about my thoughts and perspective.

7. My instructors interact with me during class.

8. My instructors encourage my participation in class discussion.

9. My instructors value my presence in class.

10. I feel comfortable emailing my instructor when I have a question.

11. I feel comfortable raising my hand in class to ask a question.

12. I feel comfortable speaking to my instructor before or after class.

13. I feel my instructor is approachable.

14. I know how to get help on coursework when I need it.

15. My instructors know my academic goals.

16. I feel I belong at Century Community and Technical College.

17. My instructors attend the cultural events I attend on campus.

Invitation for Focus Group

If you would like to participate in a follow-up focus group, complete the section below. The interviews and focus groups will be held on campus with snacks and drinks provided. Your decision whether or not to participate in the interview or focus group will not have any bearing on your previous participation in this study.

Name: _____

Email address: _____ Phone number: _____

Please indicate preferred method of contact: □ Email □ Phone

I am interested in participating in (choose all that apply): □ One-on-one interview □ Focus group

Best days to reach you (check all that apply)

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday	□	□	□
Tuesday	□	□	□
Wednesday	□	□	□
Thursday	□	□	□

Friday	☐	☐	☐
Saturday	☐	☐	☐
Sunday	☐	☐	☐

Appendix F: Open-Ended Question Survey

1. What does belonging mean to you?
2. Using the definition from the last question: Share an experience/situation when you felt like you belonged at Century Community and Technical College. (Who/what impacted the way you felt and how?)
3. Share an experience/situation when you did not feel like you belonged at Century Community and Technical College. (Who/what impacted the way you felt and how?) - this does not have to be a negative experience, just an experience that did not make you feel like your definition of belonging. This could be a neutral experience.
4. What do you think is the most important thing an instructor can do to make someone feel like they belong at this college?

Appendix G: Permission Letter for CCSM Tool Utilization

Department of Administration,
Rehabilitation & Postsecondary Education
San Diego State University
5500 Campanile Drive, EBA 229A
San Diego CA 92182

SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

RE: Pamela Yang - CCSM

Dear IRB Committee,

Pamela Yang has permission to use and adapt items from the Community College Success Measure (CCSM) for her dissertation research. The instrument is an institutional level needs assessment tool that is used by community colleges to understand factors that influence student success for underserved students. The instrument consists of 34 question blocks, including individual items as well as scales and subscales.

If you have any questions or would like further elaboration, please feel free to contact me by email at mvasquez@sdsu.edu.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

Marissa Vasquez, Ed.D.
Associate Director, Community College Equity Assessment Lab
Assistant Professor | Postsecondary Educational Leadership
San Diego State University
5500 Campanile Drive
San Diego, CA 92182
mvasquez@sdsu.edu