California Community College Presidents’ Leadership: Serving Latinx Students at Hispanic Serving Institutions

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California Community College Presidents’ Leadership: Serving Latinx Students at Hispanic Serving Institutions

By
Christina Joy Ryan Rodríguez

Claremont Graduate University
2023
Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Christina Joy Ryan Rodriguez, as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies.

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Abstract

California Community College Presidents’ Leadership: Serving Latinx Students at Hispanic Serving Institutions
By
Christina Joy Ryan Rodríguez
Claremont Graduate University: 2023

This qualitative case study examined how California Community College Presidents (CCCPs) make meaning of leading a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) to evaluate how CCCPs respond to Latinx student success gaps and support initiatives at their campuses. Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) have been more visible within community college literature, but what remains unclear is specifically how leaders at HSIs enact their leadership and direct their efforts to serve Latinx students. This dissertation addressed the gap in MSI scholarship to explicitly focus on the role of CCCPs at HSIs and their service to Latinx students.

The study applied Eddy’s Multidimensional Leadership Model (MDLM) as a theoretical framework to guide the questions and analysis of 18 interviews with CCCPs from HSIs in Southern California. Through the process of this research, the MDLM was reimagined to include specific dimensions closely related to the patterns in CCCP leadership derived from the data. The interviews with CCCPs were focused on leadership and were analyzed through the four dimensions of the MDLM framework: adaptive competencies, style, strategy, and identity to encompass a holistic view of each participant’s unique leadership profile. The adapted MDLM also represents the uses of self-reflection, which is a critical practice for leaders to understand who they are and align that with behaviors of leadership to mobilize their campuses.

The themes that emerged from the data were adaptive competencies, style, strategy, and identity. Each theme represented a dimension of the revised MDLM, which was represented on a range that allowed a nuanced understanding of the combination of traits, characteristics, and lived
experiences that inform each participant’s leadership profile. In addition to the four critical themes that comprised the analysis, a fifth theme, racial consciousness, was woven throughout the other dimensions and is at the conceptual core of this study. Racial consciousness is a theme that emerged in interviews with CCCPs categorized as the critical awareness of the implications of racial disparities that influence student experiences. Racial consciousness then refers to centering race as a factor in addressing equity goals. Not all CCCPs demonstrated a practice of or comfort with racial consciousness, though the impact of racial disparities were evident in amongst all interviews. Therefore, this study indicates that CCCPs can focus on becoming racially conscious. The findings of this study outline strategies that CCCPs can use to deepen their racial consciousness.

The findings of this dissertation also revealed that the CCCPs’ leadership profiles shaped their approaches to leading HSIs in a variety of ways. CCCPs of color engaged their leadership profile from an asset-based perspective, while white presidents still working through self-reflection are more deficit minded in internalizing how their whiteness impacts equity work. All the presidents interviewed shared their commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive campus environment for all students, but it was more challenging for white presidents to center racial justice as a lens to enact their leadership. The study also found that despite CCCPs’ commitment to closing equity gaps for Latinx students, their preoccupation with navigating the complexities of the current political climate and overcoming challenges such as limited resources and a lack of support from the state kept them from moving the college campus identity to center racial identity as an HSI.

Finally, the results of this study show that another critical component of leadership was the focus on serving versus enrolling at HSIs. Despite presidents recognizing their diverse student enrollment and concentration of Latinx students, their strategies varied regarding intentionality in
centering Latinx student experiences, in contrast to strategies that serve all students. Developing a strategy can help CCCPs to work through the tensions that they face to provide adequate interventions specifically for Latinx students at HSIs. Through interviewing CCCPs, the results of this study showed indications that self-reflection and a critical self-awareness are essential to the successful leadership of CCCPs at HSIs with a mission to serve the needs of Latinx students.

Keywords: Hispanic Serving Institution, Community College, Presidents, California Community College Presidents, Leadership, Racial Consciousness, Servingness, Leadership Profile, Latinx Students
Dedication

"If I have seen further than others, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." - Isaac Newton

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Dr. Adele Rodríguez Ryan, and all immigrant families who have made brave choices and persevered through the impossible in their pursuit of a better future. The next generation stands on the shoulders of your resilience, and your children deserve to be seen and served on college campuses as they strive to achieve their full potential.

And to my newborn son, Caleb James, may you be inspired to carry the torch of justice and equity for the next generation. Being your mother is the greatest privilege of my lifetime.

“Education is like a bell; it cannot be unrung.” - William James

Dedicatoria

“Si he visto más lejos que otros es porque me subí a hombros de gigantes.”- Isaac Newton

Esta tesis está dedicada a mi madre, la Dra. Adele Rodríguez Ryan, y a todas las familias inmigrantes que han tomado decisiones valientes y perseverado a través de lo imposible en la búsqueda de un futuro mejor. La próxima generación se apoya en los hombros de su resiliencia, y sus hijos merecen ser vistos y atendidos en los campus universitarios mientras se esfuerzan por alcanzar su máximo potencial.

Y a mi hijo recién nacido, Caleb James, que te inspires a llevar la antorcha de la justicia y la equidad para la próxima generación. Ser tu madre es el mayor privilegio de mi vida.

“La educación es como una campana; no se puede deshacer.” - William James
Acknowledgements

As I stand at the culmination of this doctoral journey, my heart overflows with gratitude for the countless individuals who have woven themselves into the fabric of my success. Their support, insightful guidance, and belief in my potential have been instrumental in shaping me into the scholar I am today. First, I extend my deepest appreciation to my Chair, Dr. DeLacy Ganley, for teaching me the importance of rigor and clarity in my writing. It was with her support and encouragement that I was able to navigate the challenges of my doctorate and see the dissertation to completion. To my esteemed committee members, Dr. Dina Maramba and Dr. Linda Perkins, I offer my heartfelt thanks for their invaluable guidance in developing my research questions and refining my methodological approach. Their years of expertise, mentorship, and scholarship have not only enriched my research journey but have also profoundly shaped me as a researcher. Their insightful comments and suggestions have significantly contributed to the final form of this dissertation.

My mentors have been guiding lights throughout this journey. Dr. Lourdes Argüelles, my source of inspiration, instilled faith in my potential and helped me find my voice as a researcher. Dr. Thai Peter Nguyen provided invaluable clarity and stimulating discourse on Minority Serving Institutions, serving as a steady anchor during moments of uncertainty. Dr. Arline Vortuba, my writing confidante, rekindled my motivation and fueled my spirit through the darkest hours. To my cheerleaders, Dr. Dilcie Perez and Dr. Michael Fileta, I extend my deepest thanks for their belief and support on this journey. Having them in my scholarly community provided the encouragement and support needed to persist through the challenges, particularly during the isolation of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of mis abuelos, Juan and Paulina Rodríguez, Cuban immigrants who made the impossible choice to send their children to the U.S. in pursuit
of a better life. Their faith in a brighter future ignited the spark that continues to propel our family forward.

My deepest gratitude goes to my mother, Dr. Adele Rodríguez Ryan, whose support and belief have been constant throughout my life and my academic pursuits. Deeply inspired by her life story and her courageous spirit arriving in the U.S. under Operation Pedro Pan as a 14-year-old refugee from Cuba, she instilled in me a deep appreciation overcoming adversity with grace and resilience building a beautiful life for our family in the United States. Witnessing her build a beautiful life for our family in the United States fueled my own determination to face challenges with conviction and navigate crossroads with the same resolute spirit. Her lifelong passion for education ignited my own desire for knowledge, ultimately leading me to pursue this doctoral degree. While words cannot fully express my boundless gratitude, I dedicate this work to her legacy of perseverance and hope.

Finally, I recognize my greatest teacher, my newborn son, Caleb James. Arriving just before my proposal defense, he has opened my eyes to a new perspective on the world and what truly matters. His innocent curiosity and resilience inspire me to be a better version of myself and dream bigger than ever before. As I strive for equity and justice for all children, his presence strengthens my resolve and guides my purpose.

This journey has been a transformative experience, filled with deep connections, personal growth, and an unwavering commitment to my ideals. I am forever grateful to the community that has supported me, challenged me, and celebrated with me along the way. This accomplishment is not solely mine, but a testament to the collective power of love, belief, and the strength of the human spirit.
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<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>California Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCCCCO</td>
<td>California Community College Chancellor’s Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCCP</td>
<td>California Community College President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO also referred to as CP</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer also known as College President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DI</td>
<td>Disproportionately Impacted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEI</td>
<td>Diversity Equity and Inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>Historically Black College and University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQIA+</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWI</td>
<td>Predominantly White Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSI</td>
<td>Minority Serving Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>HSI</td>
<td>Hispanic Serving Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>AANHPISI</td>
<td>Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders Serving Institution</td>
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Chapter One: Introduction

Community colleges are on the frontlines of solving social challenges as publicly funded institutions. They are the nation's largest and most accessible form of higher education providing transfer to bachelor’s degree attainment and career preparation opportunities. Community college students represent 40% of all first-time college freshman (Harbour, 2015). With an overrepresentation of students of color, first-generation college students, and low-income students, community colleges serve the most diverse student populations compared to any other system in higher education. Of all enrolled college students across higher education institutions, community colleges enroll 52% of Hispanic students, 42% of Black students, 56% of Native American students, and 39% of Asian Pacific Islander students (AACA FAST Facts, 2019; NCES, 2018). Community college students, especially students from marginalized communities, face a host of challenges, from financial challenges to academic preparation, which can make it difficult for them to succeed in college. To address systemic barriers faced by marginalized communities, community colleges are expected to provide holistic interventions to ensure students have the support they need to succeed, both academically and personally. Community colleges attempt to meet the demand for student-centered resources by providing wrap-around services such as financial aid, academic advising, tutoring, and mental health support. However, more resources are needed for colleges to fulfill their promise to ensure that all students have the support and opportunities they require to succeed as part of their mission. Presidents of community colleges can mobilize the mission of addressing equity gaps by setting the college agenda, allocating resources, and setting budgets that are intended meet the needs of their diverse student population.

Leadership at community colleges is particularly important in the state of California, where the community college system is the largest in the country, with 116 colleges serving over
2.1 million students (California Community Colleges Revenue by source FY 2020-21, California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office). Community colleges are microcosms of the diverse communities they serve, providing local students with a pathway to build career skills and achieve academic outcomes that lead to economic and social mobility (Mountjoy, 2022). Improved economic and social mobility are especially critical for the growing immigrant and Latinx population in California, who are disproportionately represented in the community college system.

The number of Latinx students enrolled in California community colleges (CCCs) has increased exponentially in recent years (Felix et al., 2022). In fact, 76 of the 116 CCCs now have over 25% Latinx students, making them Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) (California Community Colleges Revenue by source FY 2020-21, California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office). Competitive Title V grant funding is available to HSIs who apply which can be used to support and improve academic outcomes for Latinx students (Malcom-Piqueux et al., 2013). However, despite Title V grants and HSI recognition, Latinx students continue to lag behind white\(^1\) students in terms of graduation rates. California community college presidents (CCCPs) have an opportunity to play a critical role in leading their campuses to close equity gaps, specifically closing the graduation rate gap between Latinx and white students. To level the playing field, campus presidents can prioritize equity goals and allocate financial assistance,

\(^1\) This paper uses lowercase "white" instead of uppercase "White" to avoid perpetuating the racialization of whiteness and to promote inclusivity. This aligns with the growing movement within academia to decenter whiteness and recognize its constructed nature (Daniszewski, 2020; Nguyễn & Pendleton, 2020).
academic support, and cultural and linguistic accommodations to Latinx students to create an environment that is more welcoming and inclusive of Latinx students.

The commitment to Latinx student success begins with the CCCP’s clarity and focus to serve students and drive this mission throughout all aspects of the institution. In addition, it is important that CCCPs analyze data to understand how their students are performing. A key metric to campus success are graduation rates. It is the responsibility of the CCCP to focus on institutional practices that can improve students’ opportunities for academic success and degree completion. The CCCP sets the tone for the college, creating an agenda committed to serving all students, particularly those that are the most disproportionately impacted. Therefore, CCCP’s leadership and decisions must support their mission across all aspects of the college and create a culture of “servingness.” CCCPs can mobilize campus staff, faculty, and administration to focus on Latinx students to ensure that Hispanic students are visible, welcomed, and a valued part of the college that has institutionalized programs in place to support their success.

This study examined CCCPs understanding of their leadership role in creating a culture of institutional accountability around equity and a commitment to serve Latinx students as a Hispanic Serving Institution. The results of this study contextualized the way CCCPs enact their leadership style to create a supportive environment that prioritizes and promotes Latinx student success. Through interviewing CCCPs, the results of this study showed indications that self-reflection and a critical self-awareness are essential to the successful leadership of CCCPs at HSIs with a mission to serve the needs of Latinx students.

**Statement of the Problem: Background**

This study examined how the experiences and values of California Community College Presidents (CCCPs) influence their leadership approach at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and how they lead their campuses in serving Latinx students to move campus efforts towards
equitable outcomes and address disproportionate achievement gaps. The enrollment of Latinx students has increased to 19% of all college students between 2011 and 2021, from 3.22 million to 4.1 million students enrolled nationwide (Krogstad et al., 2022). However, despite this growth, Latinx student success is not achieved at similar rates to white students at their institutions (Bailey & Weininger, 2002; Banks & Dohy, 2019; Fry 2004; Shapiro et al., 2017; Swail et al. 2005). For example, a study by Bailey and Weininger (2002) found that Latinx students were less likely to graduate from community colleges than white students. Similarly, a study by Banks and Dohy (2019) found that Latinx students were less likely to transfer to a four-year college than white students. California Governor, Gavin Newsom, has prioritized closing the equity gaps in student outcomes for disproportionately impacted students (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Multi-year Roadmap Between the Newsom Administration and the California Community Colleges, 2022, Zinshteyn, 2022). As part of this effort, Newsom has created a roadmap between the administration and the California Community Colleges. This roadmap outlines a plan to enact a vision for success and equity for all students.

CCCPs have a wide array of competing responsibilities as the CEOs of their colleges (Eddy et al., 2015). However, in their leadership roles, they have a significant impact on the ability of their colleges to achieve equitable outcomes for all students. By strategically planning, allocating resources, and assessing results, CCCPs can help their colleges create a culture of success for all students, regardless of their background. In the last 60 years, there has been a growing focus on demographic enrollment patterns and college missions to serve specific student populations (Schneider & Saw 2016). This has resulted in an overarching body of literature on Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges (TCs). In the last 25 years, there has been a new focus on colleges that enroll 25% or more Latinx students, which also fall under the category of MSIs. These
colleges are known as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and are designated to serving the Latinx student population due to their significant enrollment.

Although there is vast diversity in types of HSIs across the United States (public, private, 4-year and 2-year colleges), in California over 60% of community colleges (CCs) are eligible to apply for HSI grants to support Latinx student success due to their enrollment designation as an HSI. However, access to HSI funding has not yet closed the outcome gaps for Latinx students at HSIs. Latinx students continue to fall behind other student populations in completion and graduation rates (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Campus leaders at CCCs set the college's vision and can prioritize goals to address the disparity in success outcomes for Latinx students. CCCPs set the agenda for their campuses and decide whether to apply for funding, how to allocate funds, and determine how publicly or privately to elevate and centralize the HSI designation to serve Latinx students.

Although HSIs are Latinx enrolling, there remains debate about whether they are truly “serving” Latinx students and supporting their success as their designation implies (Garcia, 2015). Community college student success outcomes have been well tracked and researched. However, student success outcomes have not been contextualized through how the CCCP’s leadership style and approach at Hispanic-Serving community colleges is connected to the implementation of strategies that “serve” Latinx students and improve outcomes (Contreras et al., 2008; Garcia, 2022; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). The disproportionate outcomes for Latinx students compared to other student demographics reveals a void in the literature regarding the role presidents’ leadership profile plays in focusing institutional efforts to close equity gaps in outcomes. There is a limited understanding of how CCCPs' direct leadership profile centralizes HSI designation at their colleges to prioritize and strive towards closing gaps for Latinx students, which demands attention (Felix, 2021). This study provided the opportunity to speak directly
with CCCPs to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences that led them to lead at an HSI and how they perceive the HSI designation and decisions they make in providing support for Latinx students. This dissertation research provided a preliminary understanding of the implications of how college president leadership profiles shape the college’s efforts to integrate their HSI designation in support of Latinx student success.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to examine how CCCPs reflect on their leadership at a Hispanic Serving Institution and respond to Latinx student success gaps by supporting initiatives at their campuses.

**Research Questions**

The central research question guiding the study was:

1. *What does leading a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) mean to California community college campus presidents?*

Additionally, the research sub-question framing the study was:

2. *How does the HSI designation inform a CCCP's leadership approach?*

This research centered the voices of CCCPs and provided visibility of the ways their leadership profiles shaped campus support efforts and initiatives. CCCPs shared how they prioritized the diverse needs of their students while simultaneously directing the campus to implement clear support systems and student-centered practices. The study allowed CCCPs at HSIs to share their understanding of what it means to "serve" Latinx students and empower them to complete postsecondary credentials, degrees, transfer, and career goals (Thomas et al., 2015). However, as the research also revealed, serving Latinx students may not be a targeted effort, but rather a consequence of general retention efforts for some CCCPs.
This scholarship is situated in a growing body of research on the leadership of community college presidents, particularly those leading Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This research reveals that the leadership of CCCPs is pivotal to closing equity gaps for Latinx students. This dissertation is positioned within ongoing scholarly discourses of administrative leadership and student equity research. The results of this study provide a deeper understanding of the leadership profiles of CCCPs and how these profiles shape their approaches to leading HSIs.

**Terminology**

In this study, the terms Latinx and Hispanic will be used interchangeably. Hispanic refers to a person who is a native of, or descends from, a Spanish-speaking country. Latinx is used rather than “Latino or Latina,” as a gender inclusive and neutral term for people who self-identify as having roots in Latin America, including Central America, South America, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Brazil but excludes those who were born in or descended from Spain (Baley, 2014). The “x” replaces the male and female endings “o” and “a” that are part of Spanish grammar conventions (Morales, 2018). Latinx is used throughout this study as an inclusive approach to referring to the student population under discussion. Scholars have described the purpose of using the term “Latinx” as an inclusive and transformational term that includes more people, providing a term representing the diversity of a complex community (Black & Engel, 2021; Dávaila, 2020). While Latinx is the preferred term used within this dissertation, the term Hispanic is also used as it is the common vernacular associated with Hispanic Serving Institutions. The terms Hispanic and Latinx are used in this study as they are inclusive and encompass a wider demographic of the diversity within the Latinx and Hispanic communities.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review explores the higher education disciplinary conversations centered around HSI designation, CCCs, and campus president leadership profiles to examine the interplay of these areas and how they inform objectives to successfully adopt the HSI designation and center Latinx student success programs. Throughout this project, CCCPs’ leader profiles were used as a guide to understand how campus presidents integrate the Hispanic Serving Institution identity on their campus to support programs for Latinx student success. This section presents how understanding California open access HSI community college leadership is instrumental to the higher education landscape. Additionally, this section synthesizes a review of extant literature to establish how institutions see their place in serving Hispanic and Latinx students. This chapter covers the following areas to establish the research territory grounding the study: (1) Community Colleges, specifically their open access, enrollment demographic shifts, and responsibilities to the community they serve, (2) Minority Serving Institutions Typology, (3) Hispanic Serving Institutions, specifically addressing the unique differences of Hispanic Serving Institutions and their social obligations to serve Latinx students, (4) The Role of California Community College Presidents, addressing their leadership profile that informs how they lead institutions efforts for Latinx students’ success, (5) A contextualization of CCCPs as the subjects of a case study carried out in this dissertation, and (6) A review of the theoretical framework grounding this project. The following sections establish the scholarly basis of the analysis to follow.
Community Colleges

Community Colleges in the United States

In 2020-2021, 7 million students were enrolled in US community colleges (CC), which represented 33% of all college-going students that year (CCRC, 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). CC’s emerged in the early 20th century, providing a pathway for students to complete the first two-years of college while also having opportunities to build skills for their career and prepare for transfer to baccalaureate colleges (Boggs & Cater, 1994). CCs have been referred to as the “people’s college” (Dowd, 2003; Labaree, 1997; Rendón, 2003) or “democracy’s college” (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Shaw et al., 1999) reflecting the central role these institutions serve in creating educational opportunities and creating access to higher education enrollment. CCs are democratic institutions of higher education that serve students across the United States in learning skills for the workforce while building their academic capacity for transferring to a four-year institution and increasing civic engagement (Dowd, 2007; Kezar et al., 2015; The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). Community colleges (CCs) are essential democratic institutions of higher education that serve students across the United States in learning skills for the workforce, building academic capacity for transferring to a four-year institution, and increasing civic engagement.

The core mission of the community college system is to provide access to a quality education for all students. CCs exemplify democratic ideals of equity, accessibility, affordability, diversity, and high-quality learning (Boggs, 2010; Bragg, 2001; Dowd, 2003). Democratic values are the foundation of community colleges, which directly impact students, families, and communities. Community colleges are the cornerstone of American higher education and have the potential to equalize the playing field for many disproportionately impacted students which includes Latinx students, students of color, low-income students, first-generation students, re-
entry student populations and older adults. These institutions are instrumental in addressing this country’s greatest challenges including stagnant family incomes, disparities in income and wealth, and political polarization (Freeman, 2005). Regardless of a student’s path, the democratic foundation of community colleges was established to ensure access and support towards the achievement of students’ educational goals (Freeman, 2005; Korsmo, 2014; Pitre & Pitre, 2009; Stephens et al., 2014). Community colleges embody American ideals and promote high-quality learning as one of the most important democratic values. CCs play a vital role in equalizing the playing field for students from all backgrounds and addressing the country’s greatest economic and social challenges.

Latinx students significantly underperform compared to the highest performing group of students enrolled at community colleges; thus, as disproportionately impacted (DI) students, Latinx students require intentional strategies to close the discrepancies in equity outcomes (Dowd, 2003; Felix, 2022). The demographic enrollment growth of Latinx students requires attention from presidents to ensure that support services are prioritized for Latinx students to achieve their academic goals, while also fulfilling the core mission of the CC. The successful adoption of the HSI designation into the college identity is one avenue to elevate the visibility of Latinx students and center how these students are served for students to persist, thrive, and achieve completion and graduation goals.

Students enroll in community colleges based on geographic accessibility, low cost, and open-access enrollment to achieve their goals in postsecondary credential or degree attainment. Those characteristics make CCs more attractive to first-generation and underrepresented students. Higher education degrees are required as an increase in job-skills have made college education a minimum requirement to be a competitive candidate for entry into the workforce. The United States continues to face a widening disparity between socioeconomic status and
college degree persistence and attainment. This disparity continues to be particularly significant amongst Latinx students who predominantly enroll in community college and who struggle to find a clear pathway to degree completion and transfer. Minority and low-income students earn degrees at a much lower rate than those with a higher socio-economic status and white students (Engle & Lynch, 2009). CCs hold a significant role in higher education across the US, and California has the highest concentration of CCs across the country, serving the largest single-state population of CC students.

**California Community Colleges (CCC)**

One in every four community college students in the United States attends a California community college (CCCCO, 2019; The State of Higher Education for Latinx Californians, 2021). Today, there are 116 California community colleges serving 1.8 million students (CCCCO; 2019). California was the first state to create a coherent public higher education system under the California Master Plan (Alpert, 2002; Douglass, 2010). CCCs provide an open access pathway for students of diverse backgrounds at locations that are geographically accessible and enable transfer pathways to the California State and University of California systems as well as directly into careers (Douglass, 2007; Katsinas et al., 2022). At its inception, CCC’s model was seen as innovative and was used as a design for other states in the development of their community college systems (Romano & Eddy, 2017). In California, community colleges serve a clear role in supporting communities and the state as an economic driver, providing community enrichment, workforce development, and serving employer needs. Students select California community colleges as an alternative to going directly into a four-year baccalaureate pathway due to the open admission policies, low costs, excellent academic programs, vast array of support services, proximity to students’ homes, flexibility of scheduling, welcoming campus environment, and links to other levels of education (Community College
California community colleges attract a diverse student population and are the college of choice serving as a portal to higher education for millions of college students each year to build skills, re-training, and aspire towards goals of transferring to colleges to obtain their bachelor’s degree (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Cohen & Brawer, 2008). For nearly half of all undergraduate students of color and about 40% of students living in poverty, the path to a college degree begins at a community college (Mullin, 2012). Thus, these statistics highlight the vital role CCs play in the public good to ensure educational and economic success of their most vulnerable students.

The campus demographics reflect the diverse California residents and local community populations making CCC institutions a culturally enriching place to learn (Miller & Kissinger, 2007; Quaye, et al., 2019). Amongst the diverse student profiles represented, CCCs serve an increasing number of Hispanic students (CCCO, 2019; United States, Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2016). For leaders to serve and advocate for diverse student needs, a nuanced sophistication is required to address campus processes and policies. Additionally, to best support students to succeed, staff, faculty, and administrators must understand how to engage and serve Hispanic students and other minoritized groups who may experience social and economic barriers being a first-generation low-income student (Garcia, 2017). These demographic factors are vital to the CCC mission and require focused attention by faculty and administrators to allocate resources and intervention services that create programs and support systems that promote equity and address achievement gaps between disproportionately impacted groups. The diverse enrollment demographics of more than 25% Latinx at the majority of CCCs make these institutions federally eligible under Title V to be considered Minority Serving Institutions. The number of Minority Serving Institution (MSI) has grown considerably since the 1980s (Palmer et al., 2021). In California, the diversifying
demographic trends of the state are reflected on community college campuses (Ching et al., 2020). The diverse student demographics of California community colleges (CCCs) present both opportunities and challenges for college presidents. By understanding the needs of their students, CCCPs can shape the culture at their college to promote programs and support systems that center discussions of equity to address achievement gaps for Latinx students. The CCC mission is to shape the culture and center equity to provide access to a quality education for all students and fully “serve” Latinx students.

**Growing Hispanic Student Populations Within California Community Colleges (CCCs)**

The diverse enrollment at CCCs requires college leadership to examine the needs of Latinx and Hispanic students, through consideration of their experiences, perceptions, and scholastic opportunities. The growing Hispanic student population has unique and significant experiences, which is critical to colleges’ ability to serve these students. Leaders must prioritize these students and focus their efforts in ensuring that their institutional promise is met so that Hispanic students can successfully persist and graduate. The success of Hispanic students requires the campus to be responsive, empathetic, aware, and sensitive, focusing on relationship building guided by campus leadership (Bensimon, 2007; Garcia 2020; Kopdama et al., 2021).

The CCCP plays an important role in leading a campus community of faculty, staff, and students. Leadership of CCCPs can elevate the importance and value of the HSI designation into the college identity. Leadership, and specifically CCCPs, can influence student success initiatives, making a positive difference for Hispanic students to feel seen, connected to the campus through a sense of belonging, and to achieve academic success of completion and transfer.

Latinx students coming from low socio-economic communities face additional barriers to achieving their degree (The State of Higher Education for Latinx Californians, 2021). Some of
the most common barriers for California Latinx students include limited familiarity with college
going culture as a first-generation student, needing to continue to work while going to school to
meet financial obligations, managing family expectations, navigating language barriers, and
facing challenges with undocumented status (The State of Higher Education for Latinx
Californians, 2021). In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic had disproportionate and significant
impacts on college enrollment and persistence for Latinx students, revealing a 16.6% drop
among Latinx students in community college (National Student Clearinghouse, 2021; National
Community colleges are a critical access point to postsecondary education, creating a pathway
for educational empowerment, prosperity, and engagement for Latinx students in a post-
pandemic era. CCs provide a point of entry into post-secondary education that is geographically
accessible at little to no cost and is instrumental for underrepresented student populations to gain
access to the benefits of higher education.

Since its inception, California has been a leading model for other states to follow in the
development of the junior college system. CCCs were the first to establish a law creating the
junior college system in 1907 and is the largest in both size of student body and number of
colleges (Douglass, 2007). The California community college system is a blueprint leading the
way for the rest of the United States’ community college systems to be established over the last
100 years (Boggs & Galizio, 2021). The California community college system is the oldest,
largest, and most comprehensive community college system in the United States, and it has been
a leader in innovation and reform. The CCC system has served as a model for other states, and it
continues to be a source of inspiration and guidance for community colleges around the country.
Minority Serving Institution Typology

Minority Serving Institutions

Minority Serving Institution (MSI) literature is limited in the overall scope of higher education research. One of the challenges is that they have been defined inconsistently (On Their Own Terms: Two-Year Minority Serving Institutions, 2015). MSIs educate an overwhelming majority of low-income, first-generation, under-resourced students. Yet, MSIs receive limited state and federal funding and tend to have relatively small endowments (Gasman et al., 2010). Limited funding of MSIs creates unique concerns and challenges for leadership and administration. Olivas was the first scholar to identify trends that minoritized students were enrolling in a small number of institutions, recognizing in the late 1970’s that more than 40% of minority two-year enrollments were at 83 two-year community colleges (1982). Over the past 40 years, this trend has not significantly changed. Minority Serving Institutions educate 20% of the nation’s college students, including large percentages of first generation and low-income students as well as students of color (NCES, 2015). The term Minority Serving Institutions is a broad umbrella term that encapsulates Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Minority Serving Institutions tend to be overlooked and excluded from national conversations regarding increasing college opportunities or are discussed through a deficit lens by the media, scholars, and policymakers, revealing only a limited contribution to the field (Gasman et al., 2016). This is the first step in becoming aware of the needs of specific populations to elevate the important contributions MSIs make in higher education.

The MSI designation is a federal policy that guarantees funding. However, there are no clear indicators of MSI designation beyond seeking funds to support students financially and symbolically. The designation signals that there is a concentration of minoritized students
enrolled who require attention and support. Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) were established in 1965 by the federal government and President Lyndon B. Johnson as part of the initial Higher Education Act. This pioneering legislation gave support and approval for HBCUs to serve a mission focused on educating Black students, making HBCUs the first MSIs established to serve a specific racial group (Gasman et al., 2015). In the same decade, American Indian leaders restructured higher education for Native students following the success of the “self-determination” movement in the 1960s (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 1999), under which American Indian tribes practice self-governance and operate under their own tribal constitutions (Cornell & Kalt, 2010). The Navajo Nation created the first tribally controlled college in 1968 (AIHEC, 1999). Tribally Controlled College or University Assistance Act of 1978 provided Tribal colleges federal support ten years later (Espinosa et al., 2017; Nelson & Frye, 2016). The categorization of and federal resources directed towards investing in Minority Serving Institutions are essential to advancing equity and civil rights in the United States on behalf of students.

**Types of Minority Serving Institutions**

As colleges continued to enroll larger numbers of students from marginalized groups, additional legislation, and subsequent updates of the Higher Education Act (HEA) were instituted, categorizing additional types of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). HBCUs and TCUs were established to create a space for students who were not served at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). Later, MSI designations were established based on student enrollment demographics and thus, did not emerge from a core mission of educating a specific population. Rather, they were recognized consequentially for the large number of students from specific ethnic groups who were enrolled at the college such as Hispanic Serving Institutions and Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders (AANHPIs) (Gasman et al., 2015). The
overarching term MSI represents HBCUs, TCUs, HSIs, and AANAPISIs; it is important to note that the core institutional missions, characteristics, and student demographics are unique to each MSI designation (Espinosa et al., 2017). Focusing on MSI research provides an avenue to keep higher education accountable to the issues and challenges that remain and continue to be endured by diverse student populations.

Assumptions about MSIs tend to blend the four main designations of institutions despite the context of their historical inceptions and contextual differences. AANAPISIs and HSIs are unique because they have emerged from roots of being historically PWIs, which creates tension between the institution’s origin and the demographic of students served under the MSI designation today. The demographic shifts in enrollment and community diversification due to migration have led to an evolution of AANAPISIs and HSIs focused on issues and challenges distinct from the original PWI identity and embedded mission. This is quite different from the emergence of HBCUs and TCUs, who have since their inception, been mission-driven to serve Black and Native American students. Both HBCUs and TCUs emerged through policies to respond to the need for avenues to higher education, as these students did not have equal opportunities to attend PWI colleges (Gasman, 2013). HBCUs were the first MSIs established in the late 19th century under the Morrill Act to provide land-grant institutions for Black students if admission was not allowed elsewhere (Gasman & Nguyen, 2015). Additionally, TCUs were created in the 1960’s as part of the Native and Alaska Native tribes to establish colleges specifically to serve indigenous students in alignment with the “self-determination” movement. The self-determination movement centered a desire for Native and Alaska Native tribes to have more control of their education through passing down culture and developing contemporary skills to build economic opportunities near reservations at a low cost (Hill, 1994). The Higher Education Act of 1965 created the first provision for federally funded MSIs when it defined
HBCUs. Reauthorizations of the landmark act have included subsequent designations of TCUs, HSIs, and most recently AANAPISIs in 2008. Based on the unique historical emergence and diverse contexts of MSIs, it is imperative not to blur each individual minority-serving designation under a singular MSI framework which overlooks their complexities and divergent needs.

Recent contextual research on MSIs reveal that although leaders at HSIs and AANAPISIs have a broad understanding of their designation, there are disparities in how institutions make meaning of their MSI identity and the choices they make to integrate that identity into their institutional culture (Nguyen et al., 2021). The cultural integration of HSI and AANAPISI designation is important, as institutions have emerged from the designation based on demographic enrollment shifts from being a PWI. However, institutions that carry an MSI designation may not be equally invested in embracing their MSI identity and thus integrate the designation in limited ways to serve students of color and minoritized students.

HSIs and AANAPISIs are unique, as they enroll demographic concentrations of these students, which has led to the emergence of their designation. Many AANAPISIs and HSIs share a dual designation, enrolling both a large Latinx and Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander student population. The dual designation puts AANAPISIs and HSIs in a position to navigate the racial policy that require administrators, faculty, and staff to prioritize support of both AANAPISI and Latinx students.

My research is needed to understand how the leaders of these CCCs conceptualize and enact their HSI designation. Through interviews with CCCPs this study revealed how they integrate the MSI identity to frame their work in serving underrepresented students. Leadership at MSIs provide a vantage point to show how racial equity is enacted at the institution beyond the rhetorical use of the term, which is often used haphazardly in higher education. Understanding
how MSIs enacted their designation allowed for more clarity of how institutions defined equity and how they centered underrepresented populations by shaping campus policies and practices to serve students within the outlined demographics. As the country becomes more ethnically diverse, MSIs represent what will become the future of higher education as a system; this will be especially true for community colleges with their concentration of diverse students. MSI research foreshadows the work that all institutions will need to understand as it relates to racial equity by providing a broader focus on social phenomena across the higher education systems and by understanding positionality of social and structural realities by centering minoritized students such as Latinx students. More research is needed to better understand how MSI designations address inequality and provide opportunities to challenge assumptions, identify the unique contexts of various MSI designations and better understand the role leaders play in making critical decisions that elevate the students whom their designation is focused on serving.

**Hispanic Serving Institutions**

**National Hispanic Population Growth and Increased College Enrollment**

The demographics of American higher education institutions and the United States overall have become more diverse in the last 50 years. The representation of the Hispanic student population has risen across the country but are most visible in the southwestern United States due to migration and increased birth rate of this demographic (Krogstad, 2020). The flow of immigration into this region is facilitated by the geography, shared border with Mexico, Central America, and several major ports, which create access for immigrants coming from overseas (Erisman & Looney, 2007; Migration Policy Institute, 2006). The overall Hispanic population is expected to almost double by 2060, as depicted in Figure 1. Further, Hispanic students are expected to make up 28.6% of the U.S. population by 2060 (Census, 2018).
Figure 1

*Hispanic Population in United States by 2060*

Note. The graph shows the projected Hispanic population in the United States from 2020 to 2060. From US Census Bureau, 2018.

As a result of these population trends, there are more Latinx students enrolling in higher education institutions than previously in history. Hispanic student populations have continued to show an exponential rise in enrollment, tripling from 1993-2013 (Krogstad, 2016; Olivas, 2005; Santiago, 2009). At present, one in every four elementary-school students is Hispanic, which will continue to increase the presence and visibility of Hispanic students at community colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Latinx enrollment in a two-year or four-year institution for those aged 18 to 24 has tripled from 1993 to 2013 (Pew Research Center’s 5 Facts about Hispanic Education, 2015). During that same period Hispanic student college enrollment overall increased by 201% compared to white student enrollment at 14% and Black student enrollment at 78% (Palmer et al., 2018). Additionally, the increase of Hispanic students as compared to white students has gone from 84% white and 4% Hispanic in 1980 to 54% white to 20% Hispanic in 2020, as shown in Figure 2.
Figure 2

*Percent of College Student Enrollment by Race: White vs. Hispanic*

![Graph showing percent of college student enrollment by race between white students and Hispanic students from 1980 to 2020.](image)

*Note.* The graph shows the percent of US college student enrollment by race between white students and Hispanic students from 1980 to 2020. From Pew Research, 2020.

**Federal Support for Hispanic Serving Institutions**

In 1992, Congress federally recognized the Strengthening Institutions Program with the designation of Hispanic Serving Institutions under the Higher Education Act (HEA), originally implemented in 1965 (Valdez, 2015). In 1995, HSIs were able to access grants under Title III in support of their historical and continued underfunding (Landen, 2002). Pursing federal grant funding allows for colleges and universities to apply for funds for a range of programs that may include, but are not limited to financial literacy, re-engagement of stop-out students, academic counseling, and support for degree obtainment (Department of Education, Developing Hispanic Serving Institutions Program-Title V, 2021). These grants are desirable for colleges to supplement constrained budgets; however, the funding is open and not limited to programs that support only Latinx students and may benefit all students (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2022).

HSIs broadly refer to accredited public and private 2- and 4-year postsecondary institutions in which at least 25% the institution’s enrolled, full-time equivalent undergraduates
are Latinx, and at least 50% of all students enrolled are Pell-eligible for need-based Title IV aid, under Title V (Conrad & Gasman, 2015; Santiago, 2006). There has been a 94% growth rate of HSIs over the past decade, with 569 institutions—nearly one in every five U.S. colleges and universities—classified as an HSI (Excelencia, 2021; Núñez et al., 2016). In 2008, Congress expanded Title V, adding Part B, the Promotion of Postbaccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans program (PPOHA) which allows for multi-year grants for HSIs conferring graduate or professional certificates/degrees (Aguilar-Smith, 2021). These grants were established to (a) build HSIs’ capacity and educational quality; and (b) increase Latinx and Pell-eligible students’ educational outcomes by providing awardees approximately $3.5 million over the span of five years (Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008). Congress allocated approximately $117 million to the Title V program in 2010; in 2019 the allocation only had a limited increase to $124 million despite the growth of eligible HSIs, which increased from 293 to 539 during this same period (Santiago et al., 2020).

In 2019, the total funding available for HSIs represented just $87 per Latinx student enrolled, compared with $1,642 per Black student enrolled at HBCUs (Hora et al., 2021; The Center for American Progress, 2020). The limited funding per Latinx student is a result of the increase in HSI-designated institutions while the overall funding for such campuses has stayed the same (Smith-Barrow, 2019). The inadequate funding initially provided 30 years ago continues to thin given the boom in the Latinx student enrollment. Regardless of the limited growth in federal funding, HSI leaders must situate themselves towards putting efforts for Latinx students at the center to change culture and transform campus culture through targeted student success initiatives and adoption of the HSI designation.

Most Hispanic college students attend schools with the HSI designation. In 2004, research published on minority-serving institutions through the National Center for Education
Statistics reported HSIs enrolled 50% of all Hispanic undergraduates (Li, 2007). In 2004, 1,666,859 Hispanic undergraduates were enrolled and a total of 836,677 (50.2%) were attending college classes at HSIs. A total of 611,419 Hispanic students (36.7%) were enrolled at non-MSIs. The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU, 2008) reported that as of 2008, 10% of all higher education institutions nationwide were HSIs and represented over two-thirds of all Hispanic college students. Relative to the overall number of colleges in the United States, there are relatively few institutions in which the majority of Hispanic students are enrolled (De Los Santos Jr & Cuamea, 2010). Despite the public investment in HSIs, there continues to be a discrepancy in outcomes of Latinx student success.

Students attending HSIs come with limited academic and financial resources and require significant investment in initiatives to support positive student success outcomes. Academic and financial support can be the difference in a student persisting to the next semester and completing their program of study. Basic education support such as academic support services, counseling, tutoring, and support staff is labor intensive and expensive, which make considerable demands on shrinking budgets (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). The reduced budgets create pressure for schools to pursue HSI designation to receive more funding to serve Latinx student needs. The research regarding HSIs argues that HSIs require the production of equitable outcomes for Hispanic students (Contreras et al., 2008). HSIs produce equitable educational outcomes for minoritized students when compared with non-HSIs, after controlling for characteristics such as institutional size and selectivity of applicants (Rodríguez & Calderón Galdeano, 2015). Despite data identifying some improved outcomes at HSIs overall, the intended effect related to the emergence of HSI policy and funding has not achieved the expected student success outcomes in general. This leaves unanswered questions related to the importance of the HSI designation and the efforts CCCPs are making to adopt this designation.
Hispanic Serving Versus Hispanic Enrolling

The debate about whether HSIs are Hispanic-Serving versus Hispanic-Enrolling is new to discussion in the literature which emerged around 2010. Enrollment is about full-time attendance and demographic headcount of Latinx students; whereas servingness is more intentionally connected to specific outcomes of how Latinx students are supported on campus. HSIs need to do more than provide access to college for Latinx students, they need to increase achievement and graduation rates (Espinosa et al., 2017). Garcia identified indicators of servingness that leaders can measure to assess servingness. The indicators of servingness include academic outcomes, such as persistence, graduation, transfer, course completion, STEM degree completion (a priority for the federal government), and labor market outcomes. Indicators of servingness also include nonacademic outcomes, such as the development of academic self-concept, leadership identity, racial identity, critical consciousness, graduate school aspirations, and civic engagement (Garcia, 2017). Despite the established relationship that non-academic indicators have on academic outcomes, non-academic outcomes are not often centralized in the discussion compared to academic outcomes due to the inability to measure progress (Garcia et al., 2019; Hurtado & Carter 1997; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011).

In the research, some HSIs receive positive acknowledgments in their efforts to elevate nonacademic outcomes (Cuellar 2014; Garcia and Cuellar, 2018) which need to be included when understanding servingness. Although not all HSIs pursue grants earmarked by federal agencies (such as the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the National Science Foundation), seeking the grant is one limited way to view servingness as a definition. The priorities of each federal agency for its grant programs allow for similar activities that “expand and enhance capacity, quality, and student achievement” (Santiago et al., 2016). Grant programs allow HSIs to pursue a variety of allowable activities to define servingness on
their own terms, which gives institutions autonomy while making it difficult to arrive at a mutually agreed upon definition of servingness (Garcia, 2019).

Hispanic student access and success measures determined that HSIs do very well attracting and enrolling Hispanic students (Contreras et al., 2008). However, in addressing degree attainment, Hispanic students were below equity and white students were above equity for this success measure. Contreras et al., found when reviewing ten unique HSIs institution’s mission statements that there was no mention of the HSI designation nor Latinx students or goals related to their academic outcomes (2008). The absence of the naming the HSI designation and specific Latinx students in which they serve reflects a sense of HSIs having a closeted identity (Contreras et al., 2008; Gasman et al., 2008). This lack of visibility does not create a collective responsibility and accountability among institutional leaders and faculty members for producing equitable educational outcomes for Hispanic students.

As more institutions become eligible to pursue funding and secure their HSI designation, it will continue to be important for leaders and their colleges in general to determine the best approach to actively serve Latinx students in campus practices not limited to funding access or unfulfilled promises. Ongoing discussions about HSI servingness are central to the higher education and MSI literature to assure that there is accountability and meaning to the HSI designation. The focus on servingness is necessary to the analysis at the organizational level to understand the impact of servingness on students (Garcia, 2017). The literature identifies a discrepancy in reducing gaps for Latinx students by colleges that have been granted HSI funding. Therefore, more work is needed to understand how the successful integration of HSI funding can shift institutions from Hispanic-enrollment towards Hispanic-servingness. Through their commitment to integrating the HSI designation through elevating Latinx student success
initiatives, CCCPs can lead a campus to make a meaningful difference towards achieving outcomes for Latinx students.

Recent discussions by researchers have included the debate that the HSI designation should go beyond demographic representation of students and state that faculty and institutional leaders must become advocates of change, working towards outcomes and experiences that are equitable for all HSI students (Bensimon & Malcom-Piqueux, 2012; Garcia, 2019; Witham et al., 2015). Institutional leadership is key to HSI colleges’ success. Studying community college leadership, specifically at Hispanic Serving Institutions served to identify strengths and weaknesses in president leadership and provided insights about how leadership impacts initiatives for Latinx students.

MSI research is often approached from a deficit model focused on hostile campus climates, mismanagement of money, or low graduation rates (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). Research has focused primarily on Student Affairs and student satisfaction (Palmer et al., 2022). Little is understood about how leadership at these institutions elevate and support the importance of adopting the HSI designation. Further, research is lacking about the role the president plays to advocate for student success initiatives for the students that HSI colleges are intended to serve, despite their culturally centered missions. Identifying as an MSI racializes the institution’s goals and mission and requires leaders to play a significant role in the institution’s decision-making and strategic planning to serve these students. The demographic contexts must be considered when attempting to understand MSI leadership and governance (Commodore et al., 2015). This dissertation project is important because it offers aspiring leaders of HSIs how to understand the unique landscape and necessary skills required to successfully lead and sustain HSIs. Further, this dissertation highlights opportunities for HSIs to make meaning of what it means to internalize the MSI identity within the unique institutional context beyond symbolic gestures.
This research provides a roadmap to presidents about how to make decisions that support the populations that the MSI designation intends them to serve. Having the HSI designation is not politically neutral and requires presidents to plan for positive and negative consequences on campus while internalizing and understanding what it means to identify with this designation both symbolically and through action.

**California Community College System Latinx Student Outcomes**

The California Community College (CCC) system serves the highest number of Latinx students in the state. The CCCs reflect California’s shifting demographics and are on the frontlines of serving diverse students through their open access admissions and subsidized cost of tuition. CCCs are a primary choice for 46% of all college going Hispanic students to achieve their academic goals while balancing work, finances, and family obligations, compared to 34% of white community college students (HACU 2019 Fact Sheet, 2019). Hispanic students are enrolled at a disproportionally higher rate at CCCs compared to other institution types (Malcom-Piquex et al., 2013). College choice for Latinx students can be influenced by a variety of factors such as cultural and social capital of families, neighborhood conditions, and influence of peers (Hurtado et. al, 1997).

Although Hispanic students enroll at an increasing rate at CCCs, they also experience disparate outcomes related to persistence and academic program completion. Hispanic students are the largest minority group on college campuses when it comes to college attainment rates. There are over 1.39 million Latinx students enrolled in college in California (The State of Higher Education for Latinx Californians, 2021). In California, 70% of immigrant undergraduates were enrolled in community colleges in 2003–2004, of which almost 44% of the immigrant population were Hispanic and came to California from Mexico (Migration Policy Institute, 2006; The State of Higher Education in California, 2015). The demographic growth of Latinx students at CCCs
leave these institutions with the challenge of closing the gaps for completion and transfer, which requires advocacy and access to support interventions to increase equitable outcomes at proportional rates (Erisman & Looney, 2007; Santiago, 2009; Olivas, 2005).

California colleges have a dense representation of serving Latinx student population compared to the United States overall. Additionally, over 60% of Hispanic college students in California attend an HSI, and of those, over 72% of Hispanic students are enrolled in an HSI community college (Boland et al., 2016; Boland et al., 2018; De Los Santos et al., 2010). The report from the USC Race and Equity Center, “Building Capacity for Equity and Servingness across California’s Hispanic-Serving Community Colleges” details that 92% of California’s 116 community colleges are considered to be an HSI and recognizes that the remaining campuses will likely reach the HSI eligibility enrollment threshold in the near future. This would make the entire CCC system an HSI (Cuellar et al., 2022). It is also noted that 82 of the CCCs eligible have received Title V, Department of Education grants over the past 15 years. Nevertheless, compared to all other postsecondary institutions, HSIs continue to be under resourced and funded at $0.66 for every dollar spent (Conrad & Gasman, 2015; De Los Santos & Cuamea, 2010; Garcia et al., 2019; Ortega et al., 2015). Based on the lack of personnel, resources, and institutional capacity, many HSIs cannot allocate resources for advancement activities related to fundraising, government relations, and sponsored programs, which continues to perpetuate their financial challenges and ability to have additional resources to serve students (Mulnix et al., 2004). CCCs who have applied and received Title 5 funding due to their HSI designation continue to struggle to address the equity gaps of serving Hispanic students.

After 30 years of implementation, conversations are emerging questioning the allocation of the HSI funding and whether HSIs serve students in the ways initially intended as persistence and completion rates for Latinx students have remained flat (Cueller, et al., 2022). Cal Matters,
an organization that focuses on California state education nonpartisan state news, published an article titled “Are CA CC Institutions Living Up to their Name?” that stated:

California has the most Hispanic Serving Institutions among its colleges of any state — 174, including 21 of 23 California State University campuses and five of the nine University of California campuses. But how well are HSIs — where almost 90% of the state’s Latino undergraduates are enrolled — actually serving Latino students? It’s a mixed bag, students and advocates say. (Tagami & Reagan, 2022)

The HSI designation is not fully aligned with addressing the resources needed for Latinx students to achieve equitable outcomes of success compared to white students.

**Disproportionate Academic Outcomes Among Hispanic Students in California**

Hispanic students at California community colleges experience a higher dropout rate in comparison to their white peers, which can be attributed to factors such as impacted classes, overcrowded campuses, underfunded budgets, and under-resourced personnel (Gandara, 2012; Goldrick-Rab, 2018; McCurdy, 1994). The proportion of Hispanic students who graduate within six years is 7% lower than white students at CCCs (CA Department of Education, 2018; College Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018; Margarit & Kennedy, 2019). The proportion of Latinx students that graduate in four years are nearly 14% lower than white students (The State of Higher Education for Latinx Californians, 2021; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Nevertheless, studies have found that Hispanic students who attend community colleges and obtain an Associate’s of Arts (AA degree), and then transferred to a four-year institution, did not show a difference in outcomes for BA attainment compared to white students (Contreras & Gandara, 2005; Davis, 2001; Gasman et al., 2008). The research shows that despite equal access at two-year and four-year HSIs, there is still unequal representation of degree attainment for Hispanic students compared to white students at community colleges. Therefore, CCCs provide a successful pathway to four-year institutions for Latinx students, but it remains critical to ensure
that Latinx students can persist and complete their associate degree at CCCs to achieve more equitable outcomes in degree obtainment.

There is an advantage for employees to obtain their bachelor’s degrees to be competitive for high paying jobs. The accountability to graduation outcomes is critical to ongoing investments towards increased representation of Hispanics in the workforce. Improved graduation outcomes will require increased funds, programs, and services that are intentional to support Hispanic students to improve college completion (Cantu, 2019). This is true across all majors, but especially in STEM fields. The degree completion inequity is problematic despite the growing representation of Latinx students because they are currently only half as likely as non-Hispanic whites to hold a bachelor’s degree (Ed Trust, 2018). It is imperative that longstanding achievement gaps are identified and remedied to increase success rates for Hispanic students in college.

Hispanic females outnumber Hispanic males by nearly 2-to-1 in postsecondary education (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Hispanic males are more highly correlated with enrolling in 2-year HSIs versus 2-year non-HSIs (Núñez et al., 2011; Palmer et al., 2017). Research also reveals that despite academic preparedness at community colleges, Hispanic students, especially males, did not transfer to 4-year institutions at the expected rates given their transfer readiness compared to white students (Laden et al., 2008; Núñez et al., 2011). There is a wide disparity in both enrollment and completion of Latino (male) lagging compared to Latina (female) students at CCCs (Hatch et al., 2016). Latinos (male) students who attended community colleges found that early direct connections and relationships built between these students and faculty, administrators, and staff showed a positive impact for retention and persistence (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). The responses from Latinos (male) revealed that if a meaningful engagement was not established, students did not return for additional support services, or were found to leave the
institution at higher rates than other demographic groups. This is particularly evident among Hispanic male students, which highlights the importance of student success initiatives to support positive outcomes early on in their college career where students could begin to engage with necessary resources, experience individualized case management, and adequate support to ensure student success and transfer (Saenz et al., 2013). Successfully adopting and integrating the HSI designation by CCCPs through guiding the campus agenda towards supporting student success initiatives designed for Latinx students are key to building trust, rapport, increasing a student’s self-efficacy, and creating a sense of belonging to empower them to successfully navigate the college environment.

The enrollment participation of Latinx students, a minoritized demographic in postsecondary education, is driving the growth of the number of institutions eligible for federal designation as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), making them the fastest growing of all the Minority Serving Institution (MSI) designations (Garcia, 2019: National Academics of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). Enrollment patterns for Hispanic students shows a propensity to enroll and attend 2-year public HSIs rather than non-HSIs (Núñez et al., 2011) due to accessibility, cost, and proximity to home, which is why so many CCCs are also HSIs.

To move towards more equitable outcomes for Latinx students, it is imperative to understand the role of campus presidents and how their leadership strategies meet the competing demands being placed on CCCs by integrating the HSI designation and elevating student success initiatives for Latinx students. In the following section, CCCPs leadership profiles will be explored to clarify how leaders serve Latinx students at HSIs. In addressing the various factors affecting Hispanic student enrollment in a community college, especially an HSI vs. a non-HSI, the research reveals several nontraditional factors that increased the likelihood of Latinx students enrolling in an HSI community college (Núñez et al., 2011). Community College HSIs play a
critical role in offering Hispanic community college students access to higher education. Research confirms that female students significantly outnumber males among Hispanic community college students by nearly 2-to-1; nevertheless, both males and females enroll in 2-year HSIs at a higher rate than 2-year non-HSIs (Palmer et al., 2017). HSIs are critical to mobilizing educational equality on the shoulders of historical movements such as the Civil Rights movement through their commitment to create access for Hispanic students through political advocacy (Laden, 2001; Laden, 2004; Olivas, 1982; Solórzano, 1995).

Little attention has been paid to HSI designation and the role leadership profiles play in CCCPs capacity to elevate the HSI designation as part of the college identity. The lack of research leaves questions about the leadership CCCPs play in setting an agenda that shapes the HSI designation and student success initiatives for Latinx students at CCCs. The tendency of MSI scholarship is to examine student outcomes, student affairs support programs, and experiences of students being served. This study focuses on presidents because they are key to decision making agendas that can center the value of serving minority students. This dissertation redirects the attention of MSI scholarship towards centering the Latinx student population that continues to grow and enroll at a concentrated number of institutions and explores how colleges are adopting the HSI designation and institutionalizing student success initiatives to close equity gaps by speaking with CCCPs.

**Role of the California Community College President Leadership**

Research has focused on institutional characteristics and organizational culture that contribute to positive student success outcomes for Latinx students. Presidents play a significant role on college campuses in setting the agenda to ensure that students are supported and served. Research is emerging, revealing how presidents’ leadership competencies are linked to initiatives to address the needs of vulnerable student populations (Eddy, 2013; McNair et al., 2011).
College presidents play an instrumental role in focusing the agendas of a college by mobilizing the mission and elevating goals related to Latinx student success initiatives through their leadership. This is important as community colleges are not homogeneous and neither are their leaders, communities, or their students (Eddy, 2013). Understanding the diversity of styles, traits, backgrounds, and experiences that encompass the holistic leadership profile are critical to understanding how CCCPs approach challenges, innovation, and political agendas that center Latinx students.

To date, there have been gaps in the research to identify presidents’ leadership profiles relationship to adopting the HSI designation and serving students through student success initiatives for first-generation students of color, specifically Latinx students who tend to be concentrated in community colleges and who face barriers related to persistence at a higher rate than other students (de Brey et al., 2019; Ma & Baum, 2014). Therefore, looking to CCCP’s leadership profiles is one approach to better understanding how and if colleges who qualify are meaningfully adopting the HSI designation through optimizing funds for Latinx students. By better understanding leadership through this lens, CCCP’s influence can be explored on how they prioritize serving Latinx students through student success initiatives. CCCPs are responsible for setting the agendas and goals for the campus that influence campus culture and values. Speaking to CCCPs provided opportunities to identify key competencies and dimensions in their leadership profiles and how their profiles informed their focus on serving Latinx students.

Although research has examined college president leadership, at the time of writing, no current research has addressed how leadership profiles of CCCPs relate to the successful adoption of the HSI designation and how they serve students by shaping student success initiatives to improve outcomes for Latinx students at HSIs. Centering CCCPs at HSIs through a case study approach helped to inform how their leadership profiles lead to efforts to adopt and
integrate the HSI designation and thus support and mobilize programs related to supporting student success initiatives for Latinx students. This project addressed that important gap, as there continue to be disproportionate outcomes for Hispanic students, the largest and fastest growing population in the United States.

**Situating a Case Study of CCCPs**

*Current Events and “Inception Point” for CCCPs*

The socio-political events of the last decade that have impacted racial justice have also had a profound impact on CCCPs’ capacity to lead amidst a political polarization and rampant disinformation in a post-truth era. The COVID-19 pandemic, political division and conservative national legislation has made it more challenging to lead at California community colleges with the same tools from the past. Community college presidents are expected to bring communities together, which requires uplifting the most marginalized individuals seeking education. Since the 2016 election cycle for U.S. presidents, there has been a shift in discourse in the United States that has made it more challenging to effectively lead. CCCPs are getting critiqued from every direction by their faculty, students, staff, board of trustees, and community members as they address these crisis points that have a direct impact on their students of color.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing racial disparities in health and economic outcomes. People of color were disproportionately more likely to be infected with COVID-19, to die from COVID-19, and to lose their jobs due to the pandemic (Douglas & Subica, 2020; Riley et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2021). Latinx communities and communities of color disproportionately faced challenges that created additional barriers to accessing education and supporting their needs during the pandemic. Latinx communities held positions in industries that were deemed essential during the pandemic, such as healthcare, grocery stores, and transportation (Kim & Kwan, 2021). They were more likely to live in multigenerational households, which made it
more difficult to socially distance (Lundon et al., 2020). They were more likely to have underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Communities of color were less likely to have access to quality healthcare, which made it more difficult to get tested and treated for COVID-19 (Garcini et al., 2021; Izzy et al., 2020; Tchicaya et al., 2021). CCCPs leading in this context have found themselves exhausted and desperate to continue to find urgent interventions from the aftermath of the pandemic for their students. The responses shared by CCCPs were likely influenced by their recent leadership experiences during times of crisis.

The pandemic worsened existing educational disparities, as Black and Latinx students were more likely to attend schools that have been closed or have had to operate remotely. The impact of the pandemic on students of color’s mental health resulted in a decreased academic performance, an increase in absenteeism, and increased risk of attrition (Gazmararian et al., 2021). Students from low-income families and students of color were more likely to attend schools with fewer resources and less experienced teachers, making the learning loss from remote learning even more significant. Students from low-income families were more likely to lack access to computers and internet at home, which made it difficult for them to participate in distance learning successfully (Camp & Zamarro, 2021). Family support may have been limited for students of color and low-income families during this time where parents were essential workers, working multiple jobs or who were unemployed, which made it difficult for students to get the support they needed to succeed in school from home (Molock & Parchem, 2021). The educational consequences for Latinx and Hispanic students have highlighted the critical role of community colleges in mitigating learning loss and the social consequences of the pandemic. Community Colleges were responsible for allocating millions of dollars in federal Covid-19 relief under the CARES Act in the form of Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF),
which supported their most vulnerable students (US Department of Education, 2023). HSIs received additional HEERF funding that was intended to help colleges retain, re-engage, and elevate performance of Latinx students who were impacted by the pandemic. Higher education institutions benefited from financially and emotionally supporting students of color during the COVID-19 pandemic and growing visibility of systemic racism (Molock & Parchem, 2021). CCCPs were held accountable to determine how these funds would be distributed and what programs would be supported to achieve these results with this additional funding.

In addition to a global health pandemic, the United States also faced a national reckoning with the racial disparities that underlie the public tragedies of violence against Black people. The murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 2020 sparked a wave of worldwide protests to police brutality and systemic racism. The protests highlighted the vulnerability of Black and brown communities to violence and discrimination (Lopez, 2020). The murder of George Floyd, along with Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and other Black Americans killed that same summer led to a renewed sense of urgency for racial equity in education, as many people called for reforms to address the systemic racism that Black and brown students face in schools (Nguyen et al., 2021; Pham & Philip 2020). Most colleges published solidarity statements standing with Black students. CCCPs were left to navigate empathetic communication to make Latinx students feel seen and heard while maintaining day to day operations (Brown et al., 2022; Casellas Connors & McCoy, 2022; Rodríguez & Escobar, 2023). While interviewing CCCPs, it was clear that some presidents had an easier time reconciling their own positionality and standing publicly with Latinx and students of color both in words and action, while others struggled to make statements like “Black Lives Matter.”

The political divide, the crisis of trust in institutions and their leaders, and the spread of disinformation have made it difficult to have productive conversations about race and racism in
the United States. These challenges are also evident on college campuses where CCCPs must reconcile divergent perspectives on these complex topics, allowing for free speech and academic freedom. CCCPs must lead thoughtful conversations around controversial issues such as racial equity to engage campuses in necessary equity work. Community colleges have long been seen as a democratizing force in American higher education, providing access to affordable and accessible education for students from all backgrounds. However, the goals of community colleges to achieve racial equity and student success on their campuses are simultaneously challenged by the same racial tensions that exist in the larger society. The national discourse around these topics have deepened the political divide in the United States, leaving citizens with a great deal of anger and frustration. In the interviews, some presidents shared that the current events related to racial equity have made people more steadfast in their views, making it hard for CCCPs to build consensus and find a path forward. In the current political environment, CCCPs must lead campuses to support Latinx students and students of color to navigate the social and political conditions impacting their educational goals. Thus, this study investigated how CCCPs are addressing this task.

Prior to the publication of this dissertation, there has been a wave of new legislation in many states dehumanizing and disempowering vulnerable and marginalized communities by restricting critical race theory, transgender rights, and other progressive educational initiatives. This includes laws like the Stop Woke Act and the Don't Say Gay Bill, as well as efforts to erode Roe v. Wade (Hernández-Truyol, 2022). In addition, the Supreme Court overturned affirmative action in college admissions in the case of Fisher v. University of Texas (Nuckols & Gregory, 2023). Although this policy does not impact the open access of community colleges, the decision is a major setback for efforts to achieve racial equity in education. Students who may have previously had opportunities at 4-year institutions under the affirmative action legislation may
find their only option is community college. This decision is likely to have a significant impact on the number of Black and Latinx students who are admitted to selective colleges and universities leaving CCs to ensure students are getting the quality education to be able to be competitive to transfer to 4-year institutions. Based on the interviews in this study, some CCCPs recognized the completion goals for their students as a priority and are allocating resources to support these outcomes despite the limited resources they have available to them.

**Organizational Goals of CCCPs**

Leaders play a critical role in achieving organizational goals and thus are important to centralize research around their leadership to determine how their various leadership profiles set the tone and focus objectives for CCCs. The leadership structure of CCCs include a campus president who oversees an executive team of vice presidents of various wings of the college such as Instructional, Student Services, and Administrative Services. Depending on if a college is a single college district or a multi-college district, the role of president may also be titled vice chancellor and is identified as the CEO of the college. CCCPs, including vice chancellors or CEOs, are the focus of this study because of their positions of power and how their agendas inform the vision and direction of the college, its employees, and experiences of their students.

Despite previous research on the role of CCCPs, there continue to be limitations in connecting the intersection of the Hispanic Serving Institution designation for community colleges and the role that CCCPs play. This study highlighted how CCCPs’ leadership profiles help presidents manage competing demands from day-to-day campus operations, long-term planning, and the core mission of serving students and community. CCCPs must also balance navigating social justice agendas related to current events, leveraging campus resources and priorities to move the institution forward, all while financial investments by the State and Federal government dwindle. Community colleges are a valuable context for leadership inquiry because
of the important role they play in addressing social issues. CCs, by the nature of their public mission, are critical in serving the public good, and as such, they should be accountable for achieving equitable student outcomes. This dissertation developed an understanding of how the CCCPs serve Latinx students as part of the CC mission of serving the public good.

Historically, research on college leadership has focused on baccalaureate private and public Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) (Geiger, 2004; Lewis & Hearn, 2003; Levin, 2005). As outlined in the previous sections, the growing population of Latinx students at CCCs warrants further investigation. Turning attention to CCCPs allowed for an in-depth understanding of how their leadership profiles inform their efforts to support their campus in successfully adopting the HSI designation to elevate initiatives for Latinx students at HSIs. This study focused on CCCPs to explore how their specific leadership profiles inform their college agendas to integrate and adopt the HSI designation and promote Latinx student success initiatives in service of Latinx students.

As further elaborated in the next section, using the multidimensional leadership model (MDLM), this project furthered work started by other studies in the higher education field by exploring how the MDLM allows for a multi-faceted understanding of a leader. There is a continuum of assets that successful leaders can have within the model to support the initiatives developed for Latinx students. Leadership research tends to be limited to traits or styles; however, this project assessed leadership profiles to incorporate a more holistic understanding of the leaders’ distinct approaches and competencies as part of the MDLM framework. In this project, the terms leader profile and leadership profiles are used to denote various dimensions measured within the model and the use of these terms allows leaders to be understood more comprehensively and not limited to a narrow singular idealized pathway of a successful leadership approach. The MDLM allows for research to uncover how leaders express their
unique combinations of strengths, experiences, and styles, informed by their campus context to apply their leadership profiles to meet the needs of their college.

Through a qualitative case study focused on community college Hispanic-Serving Institutions in California, CCCPs were interviewed to better understand their leadership profiles and choices. Analyzing their leadership profiles revealed how they situated their institution as Hispanic Serving and evaluated whether their narrative revealed a Hispanic serving or Hispanic enrolling culture. Thus, the findings of this study support the understanding of how leaders meaningfully adopt the HSI designation.

Deepening the understanding of CCCPs contributes to better understanding assets and potential liabilities in unique leadership profiles and how CCCPs integrate or compartmentalize the HSI designation, consequentially impacting initiatives that serve Latinx students. Focusing on CCCPs, this study highlights how CCCP’s leadership profiles are elevating Latinx student success initiatives while integrating and adopting the HSI designation to serve Latinx students. The study reveals insights specifically centered around the following research questions:

1. What does leading a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) mean for a California community college campus president?
2. How does the HSI designation inform the CCCP's leadership approach?

Theoretical Framework: Multidimensional Leadership Model

The Multidimensional Leadership Model (MDLM) served as the theoretical framework for this study, which was guided by Pamela Eddy's 2012 book, *Community College Leadership: A Multidimensional Model for Leading Change*. The MDLM was used to develop the interview questions and to provide a framework for analyzing the transcripts of the interviews. The term "multidimensional" refers to the ability of leaders to draw upon a variety of skills and perspectives to lead effectively in their unique college contexts. Eddy's model identifies five key
dimensions of the MDLM: (1) Leadership Schema: This refers to the way the leader sees the world informing their core beliefs about what it means to lead; (2) Gender: Gender plays a role in leadership as one dimension of identity; (3) Communication: Leaders require effective communication, especially in community colleges that must build consensus with a variety of stakeholders; (4) Sense Making and Framing: This refers to a leader's ability to interpret complex situations and develop a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing their college; and (5) Competencies: This refers to the specific skills and knowledge leaders need to be effective.

Eddy argued that all five dimensions of the Multidimensional Leadership Model (MDLM) are important for community college presidents (CCCPs). However, depending on the context, one dimension may be more valuable to provide effective leadership in a specific situation. This framework acknowledges that leaders are multifaceted, intersectional, and nimble in meeting the unique demands of leading their college, integrating the various dimensions as needed in alignment with their authentic self. This theoretical framework provided a way to visualize how all the dimensions are at play simultaneously as they inform leadership practices and outcomes.

There is no ideal leader profile or preferred location on the leadership profile continuum within the MDLM. Rather, the MDLM provides an interpretive inclusive approach to understanding the complex skills and perspectives that are needed to lead effectively in today's challenging environment. Eddy and Boggs (2010) assert that "the multidimensional model of leadership assumes that a wide range of individuals can be successful leaders" (p. 139). The transcript analysis of CCCPs revealed their perceived competencies, style, and strategy. Thus, a variety of dynamics across the dimensions within the CCCPs leadership profiles were identified.
The initial MDLM framework was modified in two updated iterations from the model as first constructed by Eddy. The original MDLM included the dimension of gender, within a male-female dichotomy. Utilizing the original model in its unabridged form would have been limiting and reductive to assess leaders on a gender scale that is restricted by binary polarities (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019). This research aimed to address leaders holistically and inclusively, therefore the initial adaptation of the MDLM removed gender and substituted leadership approach to capture the nuance of individual leadership styles and approaches. Leadership approach in this initial revision was more accurate and inclusive than gender, and it allowed participants to be more fluid in sharing their personal reflections on their leadership style and approach. This change aligned with Eddy's intent to recognize that race and gender inform how leadership is performed and allowed interviewees to respond authentically, inclusive of any personal biases and limitations. The use of a gendered scale was too reductive, which demanded a more inclusive and updated MDLM theoretical framework to approach this research. Following, Figure 3 shows the bands on the continuum of the MDLM used to develop interview questions, which provided an initial framework to begin to analyze and understand CCCPs responses.

**Figure 3**

*Multidimensional Leadership Model (MDLM) Version 1*
The Multidimensional Leadership Model (MDLM) was used to get a more holistic understanding of the leadership profiles of CCCPs at Hispanic-Serving Institutions and to evaluate how they perceived their leadership at their HSI to serve Latinx students. The MDLM theoretical framework allowed for a deeper understanding of the experiences reported by CCCPs in interviews. The MDLM draws from the multifaceted nature of leadership, which recognizes that "…leaders who seek to solve every problem with the same set of leadership actions will not succeed for long" (Eddy, 2012). CCCPs discussed their need to continuously improve and make data-driven decisions by going through an iterative process of evaluating their efforts to meet the needs of each distinct problem. Leadership is a subjective process, and the MDLM helps to organize the variation of where leaders fall on each dimension and the unique competencies they have, providing a more complete understanding of leaders' profiles.

To align their leader profiles with specific approaches outlined in the MDLM model, this research identified whether there was a more pronounced inclination to center HSI designation and support campus initiatives that serve Latinx students. While there were some similarities in strategy and approach, not all CCCPs were aligned when it came to racial consciousness and understanding the systemic oppression and discrimination that Latinx students face on their campuses. The leadership profiles supported the data analysis process by illuminating competencies, behaviors, skills, and characteristics that are useful for a president to possess to lead their institution in adopting and integrating the HSI designation successfully. For example, some white CCCPs were reluctant in addressing racial equity as an HSI directly and felt the task was daunting. They believed that their efforts as white leaders would not be enough to make a difference. In contrast, presidents of color were more likely to see themselves as aligned with the community and to believe that they could make a difference in addressing racial equity. The MDLM revealed that white CCCPs fell more in line with "minding the bottom line" when it
comes to the discussion of race in campus planning, while CCCPs of color fell more in line with “inclusivity” as an adaptive competency.

This research used the Multidimensional Leadership Model (MDLM) to position community college presidents (CCCPs) within the model and analyze their interview comments. This allowed for a better understanding of the intersection of their leadership profiles and how they compared to other CCCPs in the study. The MDLM theoretical framework allows leaders to be understood on a continuum, recognizing that there is no ideal leadership profile. Rather, leadership competencies are best interpreted using a continuum to capture the nuances of individual leaders. Applying the MDLM to interview data collected from CCCPs provided an opportunity to understand how their leadership profiles inform their approach to their college's HSI designation. This provided insights into how they prioritized specific student success initiatives, used language to convey their goals, and committed resources to serving Latinx students at HSIs. CCCPs' adaptive competencies, unique identities, style, strategy, and level of comfort with racial consciousness all intertwine to shape their leadership profiles, providing a deeper understanding of how they perceive their leadership in serving and centering Latinx students as an HSI.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This study contributed to higher education research on Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) through a qualitative research approach. Through 18 interviews with CCCPs, this study exposed how CCCPs perceive of and enact their leadership. The study welcomed CCCPs to share examples of how they make meaning of their institution’s HSI designation through efforts to support Latinx student success. The responses to interview questions centered around leadership allowed for an understanding of each CCCP’s leader profile. The research design was based on the subjective experiences of sitting presidents and aimed to capture the essence of their experiences (Galletta & Cross, 2013; Creswell, 2016).

This study utilized in-depth semi-structured interviews with campus presidents at California Community Colleges (CCCs) that can be officially or unofficially identified as a Hispanic Serving Institution. Interviews were all similar in length taking about 60 minutes and took place over Zoom and were recorded and saved to a password protected drive to which only the researcher had access. Each participant and their institution were assigned a pseudonym to protect their privacy (see sample information in Table 1 below). Open-ended questions were asked to allow the participants to construct their own meaning of their experiences. Saturation of the study was reached after conducting 18 interviews. CCCPs were recruited through an email invitation that was sent to 50 Southern California community college HSIs to ensure similar institutional contexts. Responses were received from 20 CCCPs. One CCCP never responded to any follow-up emails and one CCCP was unable to meet during the interview period. The interview modality allowed for the development of in-depth insights to explore how presidents perceived their role at their institution, which facilitated a deeper understanding of the CCCPs’ approaches to serving the Hispanic student population.
Sample

A purposive sampling technique was utilized to focus on presidents at California community colleges with the Hispanic Serving Institution designation (Trochim et al., 2016). Invitations were sent to all eligible CCCPs in Southern California who met the specific criteria for HSI (see Appendix A). Follow-up communication was also sent to presidents’ executive or administrative assistants. Interviewees were not offered any compensation for their participation. However, they were informed that their participation supported efforts to advance the scholarship regarding CCCP leadership. After successfully completing the first interview with President Stevens, he found the research topic timely, and the interview questions so thought provoking that he contacted his peers at other institutions that met the criteria and encouraged them to participate in this study. President Stevens found the time participating in this study worthwhile, and his warm introduction and referral made it easier to schedule follow-up interviews with presidents who had demanding and impacted schedules. Following, Table 1 shows a breakdown of the CCCPs who participated in this study. First, Table 1 shows the pseudonym of each president and their college. Then, a column called ‘Exec Exp’ lists how many years each participant spent in executive roles prior to entering the presidency. The years of experience in executive leadership ranged from 2 years to 11 years at the time of data collection. Additionally, the table shows how many years of experience each CCCP has had in their current role. The table also outlines the geographic location, gender, and race of each participant.
Table 1

*Sample Population Demographic Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>COLLEGE (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>EXEC EXP</th>
<th>CCCP EXP</th>
<th>GEOGRAPHY</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>RACE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avila</td>
<td>Baja College</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrett</td>
<td>Desert College</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Asian/Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calderón</td>
<td>Great Basin College</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>&lt; 1 year</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas</td>
<td>Mountain College</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stevens</td>
<td>Downtown College</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hernandez</td>
<td>Shoreline College</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerson</td>
<td>Palm College</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Riverfront College</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillips</td>
<td>Metropolitan College</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friedman</td>
<td>Canyon College</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabila</td>
<td>Valley View College</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogers</td>
<td>Coastal College</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>Forrest College</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>&lt; 1 year</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonzalez</td>
<td>Alta College</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinn,</td>
<td>Peak College</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ito</td>
<td>Lakeshore College</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver</td>
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<td>10 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>Center College</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>&lt; 1 year</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 above provides a demographic overview of the sample population interviewed for this study. The sample represents 18 CCCPs who completed the interview process. The sample is reflective of the overall California community college president leadership at large (Bensimon & Associates, 2022). To provide an additional visual representation of the demographic representation of the sample population, Figure 4 is included below. Figure 4 shows the proportion of participants who identify as male or female, the geographic background of each participant, and a breakdown of the racial identities of participants.

**Figure 4**

*Gender, Racial Demographic, and Geographic Breakdown of Presidents*
Note. This pie chart shows the gender and racial demographic breakdown of the 18 CCCPs and the geography type (rural or urban) that they serve. The different colors of the bars represent the instances of presidents who identify as each specific demographic category.

Figure 4 provides a visualization of the gender and racial demographic breakdown of the 18 CCCPs and the rural (2 colleges) or urban geography (16 colleges) at the campus site that they serve. The various colors of the bars represent the instances of presidents who identify as each specific demographic category revealing a diverse sample of 7 women and 11 men and equal portion of white presidents (9) and presidents of color (9).

In addition to getting a sense of the demographic breakdown of the sample by identity factors, it is also important to consider their professional lives and experiences. Following, Figures 5 and 6 highlights the wide scope of years of experience that the 18 CCCPs had ranging from months on the job to more than 11 years in the role at the time of the interview. The bar chart shows the number of years that the presidents represented in the study have been in executive leadership prior to becoming a California community college president (CCCP).
Figure 5

*Years of Experience in CCCP Role*

*Note.* The x-axis of the graph shows the number of years in the role of CCCP, and the y-axis shows the number of presidents who have had that number of years of experience.
Note. The x-axis of the graph shows the number of years in executive leadership, and the y-axis shows the number of presidents who have had that number of years of experience.

The CCCPS interviewed had experience in executive leadership to varying degrees. Most of the participants had 2-4 years of experience in executive leadership prior to entering the CCCP position. Most of the participants served in their current role as CCCP for between two and four years. Notably, community college presidents in the US typically serve for 5.9 years on average (Melidona et al., 2023). Typical presidents have been in their current job for 5.9 years, which is down from 6.5 years in 2016 and 8.5 years in 2006 (Melidona et al., 2023). The sample of California community college presidents in this study reflect years of service consistent with national trends. Therefore, the saturation of 18 interviews met expectations for completing data collection and advancing to coding and data analysis.
Protection of Human Subjects

Prior to data collection, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol was submitted at Claremont Graduate University. Verification of exemption approved was received without renewal from the IRB on February 28, 2023, to conduct this research. Informed consent forms were signed by all participants, then recorded and stored digitally by the principal investigator (see Appendix B). After the online consent form was signed by the participant, consenting presidents were redirected to a brief background and demographic survey which included educational attainment and years in leadership. After the consent form and background and demographic survey were signed and received by the principal investigator, participants were scheduled for Zoom interviews. During Zoom interviews, each participant was asked the same series of scripted interview questions (see Appendix C). All participant identities and college names are protected by pseudonyms and all other identifiable information was redacted from the final analysis. Files were kept on a private password protected drive that only the principal investigator has access to. After audio files were transcribed and verified, they were erased as an extra measure to protect participants.

Data Analysis

As discussed earlier, this study adapted Eddy's Multidimensional Leadership Model (MDLM) as the theoretical framework. The MDLM was used to guide the research question and interview questions, and it also informed the data analysis of the interview transcripts with the CCCPs and helped to organize the four major themes from the transcript codes. The MDLM identifies four dimensions of leadership: identity, adaptive competencies, style, and strategy. The identity dimension refers to the leader's sense of self and their beliefs about leadership, shown on the model as sense-making. The adaptive competencies dimension refers to the leader's ability to adapt to change and to learn new things which is identified on the MDLM as communication.
The style and strategy dimension refers to the leader's approach to leadership and how they interact with others, as seen in Figure 3 in the literature review, which includes the dimensions sense-making, communication, and leadership approach.

To identify the different dimensions of leadership in the transcripts, the MDLM was used to look for specific keywords or phrases that relate to each dimension. For example, keywords or phrases that relate to the identity dimension include "personal experiences," "beliefs about leadership," or "sense of self." Keywords or phrases that relate to the adaptive competencies dimension include "change," "learning," or "challenges." Keywords or phrases that relate to the style and strategy dimension include "approach to leadership," "strategies for success," or "interactions with others." Once the keywords for different dimensions of leadership were identified, the codes and themes from the transcripts were determined by looking for patterns in the data. For example, a majority of presidents interviewed discussed their personal experiences as Latinx people, which was coded as a theme of identity. Many presidents shared their experiences navigating the challenges of leading an HSI, which was coded as a theme of adaptive competencies. A number of presidents talked about their specific approach to leading an HSI, which was coded as a theme of strategy. Presidents also discussed the way they interact with their campus teams, such as how their personality and values are performed in their leadership, which aligned with keywords such as collaborative, visionary, passionate, and communicative, and was coded as a theme of style.

The theme of racial consciousness is also part of the MDLM framework. Eddy's model acknowledges that race and ethnicity inform how leadership is enacted and is part of the leader’s identity which may also include unconscious inherent bias. In reviewing the interviews, the overarching theme of racial consciousness was a foundational code connected and intertwined to
all the other dimensions in the MDLM which could not be isolated independently. For example, a few presidents discussed the importance of partnerships in the Hispanic community, modeling serving leadership in solidarity with students, and prioritizing equity work, which are all represented as a racial consciousness dimension.

The MDLM was a useful tool for analyzing leadership transcripts. The model provided a systematic way to identify and understand the different dimensions of leadership that were present in the interview analysis, allowing me to go deeper in my analysis of the leaders' perspectives and to identify the factors that are most important to them. This ensured that CCCPs’ voices were captured authentically through their insights and perceptions.

The initial method of analysis was summative content analysis, which involved reading and rereading the transcripts to identify the broader landscape of themes in the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The CCCPs' responses were analyzed individually to provide insights into how the student demographic, specifically Latinx students, influences their distinct leadership approach. The recordings and transcriptions were analyzed in detail to compare the different CCCP narratives and identify emergent themes across the dataset.

Next, Saldana's axial coding process was utilized by first open coding the transcripts to identify the initial codes. After the first round of analysis, a holistic coding approach was utilized where each transcript was reviewed in depth to identify more nuanced themes and patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Selective coding took place to determine the most critical codes and themes that were analyzed in this study. Axial coding was utilized to identify patterns and discover more nuanced meanings in the data, and to determine how the codes were related (Saldana, 2009). As depicted in Figure 7, emergent patterns allowed for the creation of broader categories linked together to form four primary overarching themes: identity, adaptive
competencies, style, and strategy. Responses related to racial consciousness were integral to every president's interview and thus, racial consciousness became a fifth subtheme that touched on each of the four major themes. This approach combined the strengths of both summative content analysis and holistic coding to provide a comprehensive, accurate, and reliable understanding of the data. Figure 7 below provides a holistic view of the Leader Profile encompassed by the four primary themes that were generated by the various codes: identity, adaptive competencies, style, and strategy with a subtheme of racial consciousness that touched the four major themes. These themes are intersectional and reflect dimensions of the multidimensional leadership model.

**Figure 7 Themes Identified through Transcript Analysis**

*Note. Depicts major themes derived from CCCPs interview transcription data analysis.*
Instrumentation

Each participant was asked a series of twelve interview questions comprised of ten content-based questions and two general follow-up questions (see Appendix C). The questions were developed utilizing the Multidimensional Leadership Model in conjunction with the research questions. The questions were focused on the primary elements of the MDLM, including leadership approaches, leadership schema, communication styles, competencies, and sensemaking and framing. The responses to the interview questions helped to better understand the presidents’ leadership profile regarding serving Latinx students. Each interview question was tied back to a specific research question to support overall alignment.

Positionality Statement

I am a first-generation American, raised in Southern California by my single mother who is a Cuban immigrant, which has informed my passion and advocacy for the Latinx community in higher education. My unique experiences as an identifying Latina have given me an increased sensitivity towards educational power dynamics. Additionally, as a Hispanic administrator at a Minority Serving Institution, I am directly involved in the challenges and opportunities facing Latinx students at CCs. My twenty years of experience working in higher education, specifically with advocacy for disproportionately impacted (DI) students of color, has given me firsthand knowledge of the complexities of CC leadership. This research is a product of my passion for social justice and my commitment to improving the lives of Latinx students.
Chapter Four: Findings, Results, and Discussion

This chapter presents findings from interviews with Hispanic Serving California Community College Presidents (CCCPs) to explore how they conceptualize their leadership. Additionally, this chapter evaluates how the CCCPs’ leadership influences their respective campus agendas based on patterns that emerged from the coding and analysis of the interviews. The analysis of 18 interviews with CCCPs revealed several clear dimensions related to their leadership perspectives. The interview questions focused on serving Latinx students and exploring efforts to meet campus equity goals. The analysis revealed four primary themes also described as leadership dimensions: identity, adaptive competencies, style, and strategy. These themes capture the relationships between the CCCPs’ responses and offer a valuable assessment of their priorities as they lead HSIs. Axial coding was used to create a conceptual framework that aligned with the Multidimensional Leadership model (MDLM) that captured the relationships between the responses from CCCPs (Saldaña, 2016). It became evident through the analysis that racial consciousness was a subtheme that was woven through each dimension and revealed a deeper understanding of the meaning of servingness and how to be a racially conscious leader at an HSI. This suggests that racial consciousness is a foundational focal point for current CCCPs. Discussing these codes as dimensions allows a construction of leadership that is more nuanced than being constrained to a single identity, adaptive competency, style, or strategy. Instead, the codes provide a more holistic understanding of how presidents situate themselves and perceive their leadership impact.

In the following sections identity is discussed first as a dimension for the analysis representing the codes that CCCPs share regarding who they are and what parts of their identity have the biggest impact in creating a perception of who they are as CCCPs. Identity refers to the
CCCPs’ sense of self and their beliefs about leadership. This dimension includes codes such as: Personal experiences, beliefs about leadership, sense of self, ethnicity, race, gender, cultural background, family background and education. Next, adaptive competencies that were coded from the interview were analyzed. Presidents identified that these are the core qualities that they perceive make them inherently successful in their roles. Adaptive competencies refer to the CCCPs’ ability to adapt to change and to learn new things. This dimension includes codes such as: Change, learning, challenges, resilience, flexibility, and problem-solving. Following, the dimension of style was discussed by reviewing characteristics that inform the way presidents engage in their community. Style refers to the way the CCCPs lead and interact with their campus teams and how they make decisions. This dimension includes codes such as: Collaborative, visionary, passionate, communicative, inclusive, and democratic. The next section highlights various strategies that CCCPs identified during their interviews. Many of these examples were related to closing equity gaps for Latinx students and being intentional at leading a Hispanic Serving Institution. Strategies refers to the specific actions that the CCCPs take to lead their institutions. This dimension includes codes such as: Closing equity gaps, being intentional, leading at an HSI, partnering with the community, hiring diverse faculty and staff, and promoting student success. Racial consciousness is a sub theme that touches on the other dimensions and delves deeper into the meaning of servingness and how to be a racially conscious leader at an HSI, further exploring the meaning of 'Hispanic serving' and the differences from 'Hispanic enrolling' institutions. The findings from the interviews suggest that the CCCPs are aware of the challenges and opportunities associated with leading an HSI. They are also committed to serving the needs of their Hispanic students and to promoting equity on their
campuses and are evolving their understanding and grappling with the complexities of leading their HSI with a race conscious lens.

The CCCPs in this study discussed the need to be anti-racist leaders and to create campus cultures that are welcoming and inclusive of all students. An anti-racist president understands the history and impact of racism, particularly on Latinx students, and how it continues to shape society today. Anti-racist presidents speak out against racism, confront racist stereotypes and assumptions directly, and challenge themselves to dismantle systems and structures that perpetuate racism at their institutions. They also promote equity and inclusion by creating a culture where students feel welcomed, respected, and supported (Dei & Johal, 2005; Kendi, 2019). This means ensuring that all students have the same opportunities to succeed, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or background.

The chapter concludes by discussing the tensions that the CCCPs experience as they seek to balance the competing priorities of serving a diverse student population, promoting Hispanic student success, and maintaining fiscal sustainability and business operations. It also addresses the complications the current social political climate has had for leaders to bring stability, consensus, and equity into focus on campus. This requires a nuanced leadership skillset to bring the campus community together in support of moving equity work forward at their institutions.

**Conceptual Core: Racial Consciousness**

In this section, the CCCPs' comments about power dynamics, relationship building, positionality, white privilege, and racial consciousness are discussed. Power differentials are inherent in the hierarchical organizational structures of CCCs, where the president is the CEO and sits at the top of the decision-making organizational chart. These historical power structures, which mirror other large bureaucratic organizations, have been in place since the inception of CCCs. In the interviews, presidents were asked how their perception of community college
president leadership had changed based on their experiences in the role. In response, presidents felt prepared for the role based on their career paths and time in other executive leadership roles. However, each CCCP also shared surprising moments and how leading in the role of president is different from what they had anticipated. Throughout the interviews, white leaders often noted their position of privilege and paid much attention to racial politics. Many white male presidents were acutely aware of their whiteness in serving diverse campus communities and how they might be perceived as they led equity initiatives. The following sections explore how leaders reflect on racial identity and the ways it informs leadership in the current political climate, specifically how white male presidents in this study understand privilege and how CCCPs of color center their work on equity and racial justice issues.

**Positionality and White Privilege**

Navigating power dynamics as a white president requires sensitivity and recognition of privilege especially when simultaneously reconciling racial dynamics. Dr. Stevens, a white male president from Downtown College, shared an example from his first weeks in the role as a new CCCP. While walking the campus with the maintenance team which were all Latino, he casually shared a hypothetical question: “Wouldn’t it be nice if there were roses here?” pointing to an empty field near his office. To his surprise, someone planted roses soon after. This experience made him realize that, as president, he must be mindful of the weight of his words and the power dynamics at play. Now that he has been in the role a few years he is more cautious with his words. However, Dr. Stevens is noticing that in the current political climate, some of the conversations he has with individuals on campus are "gotcha conversations," where people are looking to catch him saying something wrong. He finds it more challenging than he did in his
previous role as vice president to build open and collegial relationships with faculty and staff which he finds disappointing. Dr. Stevens shared:

This experience made me realize that I can’t say whatever pops in my head. The president is seen to be the know all and final authority. People are listening and taking directive on the words that are coming out of my mouth, whether I was intentional or not. In my past roles I was used to having conversations with people that are genuine and collegial and now it seems I must be more cautious during these times of heightened tension on campus. I have had some of the conversations specifically asking the Academic Senate, ‘What can I do to make things better?’ Like, ‘How can we improve? What can I do?’ Those types of questions and [I get] crickets, crickets. But behind my back, it’s anything but crickets, crickets. That has been one of the things that has changed since I first started in the role. And so, there isn't a lot of grace for any casual conversations, right now. I'm a little jaded.

President Stevens's anecdote highlights the importance of presidents being hyper-aware of the weight of their words and the power dynamics at play when communicating with campus community members, especially those from marginalized groups. As a white male president, he is keenly aware that his words can carry significant weight and influence the actions of others, even when they are intended to be casual or passing. He also alluded to the current challenges related to campus climate, which make it difficult for him to have open and honest conversations about racial equity and other important issues. President Stevens has expressed a desire to improve relationships with campus community members, but he has found it challenging to obtain direct feedback and feels that he is not given much leeway for mistakes. It may be helpful for President Stevens to be more mindful of his white privilege and the power dynamics at play when interacting with campus community members, especially those from marginalized groups.

On the other hand, President Oliver, also a cis white male, seems keenly aware of his positionality and the power dynamics at play as president. He recognizes that his identity may create barriers with students, therefore he takes active steps to mitigate this by being open and approachable. Given that some students have had negative experiences with white men in power
positions, Dr. Oliver recognizes that he must earn respect and build relationships with students intentionally to ensure that all students feel safe, supported, and valued at the college. Dr. Oliver identified himself as a former athlete with an imposing stature and therefore takes active steps to mitigate an intimating persona by making efforts to be open and approachable in his leadership role. He said he does this by “speaking and listening and using body language in a way that's welcoming,” adding that, “I attempt to disarm assumptions.” Dr. Oliver's approach to leadership demonstrates the importance of self-awareness, humility, and intentional relationship-building for white male presidents seeking to create a more equitable college environment. He encourages other presidents to practice inclusive behavior and self-reflection as part of their equity-based leadership style to build trusting relationships with students. He said:

I'm white, I am male those things are registered before someone gets to know me. Historically, these are not seen as the most welcoming attributes and have people on guard. It doesn't bother me, that's one of the things that I think about and encourage leaders to think about as really reflecting on who they are. When we get into conflicts, I don’t think if others like me, things are not personal. Don't think of it as if someone is doing that to me, making my job difficult. Ask a question: Why are they feeling the way they are? Reflect on that. You'll find the answers in terms of what's the real topic of importance to them. And this is the president’s opportunity to help them resolve it.

President Oliver is aware that his identity as a tall white male could be a barrier to achieving equity. As a result, he suggests that he has made equity a priority and he has committed to setting aside personal agendas in conflicts to focus on the needs of students. Uniquely, President Oliver pivots his response towards providing advice to fellow CC presidents, suggesting that reflecting and asking the right questions will support their ability to resolve conflicts. However, President Oliver fails to turn the attention to himself and address how he has resolved issues in the past.

Presidents Rogers and Oliver both emphasized the importance of getting out of one's comfort zone to recognize one's positionality and actively engage in work to benefit the most vulnerable students at their institutions. This includes Latinx students at Hispanic-Serving
Institutions (HSIs). Leaders shared that they must step out of their comfort zone if they are committed to serving Latinx students as an HSI because often conflicts between leaders and the campus constituents are not personal, rather come from a place that requires further reflection by the leader. White presidents can leverage their privilege to be an ally and advocate to create change and support their students in meaningful ways.

Across interviews with CCCPs, there was an emphasis on how their individual identities informed their leadership, making them more or less relatable to the people they served. CCCPs shared their family background, educational experiences, career experiences, immigration status, and their intersectional identities. There was also a perception that their identities can have a positive or negative impact on moving equity-related work forward.

All but one of the white male presidents explicitly identified their demographic privilege and how it had played a role in their lived experiences despite facing personal challenges that some presidents named such as growing up in poverty, being a first-generation college student, or being raised by a single mother. They acknowledged that their whiteness provided access, opportunity, and pathways to success that people of color were not extended.

For example, President Phillips from Metropolitan College shared that his background as a white first-generation college student raised by a single mother, although challenging, did not result in barriers or limitations to his success. He said:
I have had opportunities extended to me that have opened some doors because I'm a white male with some talent. But what became clear to me was that that wasn't true for everyone. So, to be able to choose what I went into, because I have a PhD in STEM, I had opportunities to go into the private sector. My first position was a professor. But that wasn't what I wanted to do. I chose community colleges because it was part of what I really believe in. I realized I wanted to provide opportunities to enable students to fulfill their full educational potential. And I saw that I had that advantage. And many other people that I grew up with just didn't have it. I had an eighth-grade teacher that said, ‘Hey, you know, your high school that you're going through has an honors program, you ought to do that.’ I had a chemistry professor who was great during the Sputnik era. I got a national defense student loan to go to graduate school, and all those things just fell into place without much effort. And yet, I recognize that those opportunities are not available for everyone.

President Phillips was the most direct in acknowledging his privilege and how his whiteness provided him with opportunities that were not available to people of color, although similar beliefs were shared between most white male presidents across the study. In addition, many of the white male CCCPs named that their whiteness could be a barrier to advancing equity work, as some individuals on campus may be suspicious of their motives or doubt their ability to fully understand and address the needs of communities of color, questioning if they are the right person for this work in this political climate. While white male CCCPs in this study were generally aware of their privilege and how it impacted their leadership and relationships with others, it is important to note that the experiences of CCCPs of color are often very different. In the next section, we will explore how CCCPs of color navigate the challenges and opportunities of their positions, and how they are working to advance equity and justice on their campuses.

In this study, presidents of color, drawing on their own identity and experiences as minorities from marginalized communities, shared how they are uniquely positioned to understand and address the challenges and experiences of their students and communities. Despite feeling vulnerable and exposed when sharing personal details, they felt a level of expectation and pride to share their resilience and strength, build solidarity with students, and
elevate racial consciousness on campus. They purposefully and publicly leveraged these stories to connect with students and communities, building trusting and authentic relationships. These presidents found value in being able to relate to their students that community college is intended to serve, and they believe that their experiences can exemplify their commitment to pursuing meaningful equity initiatives to improve student lives.

As mentioned throughout the discussion of identity, racial consciousness is a throughline that touches on all the emergent themes discussed across this chapter. Racial consciousness came up as direct experiences in CCCPs identities which also informed the ways in which they engage with style and strategy and build adaptive competencies to address issues. The interview data that led to this code of racial consciousness came from conversations around efforts related to being an anti-racist leader, diversity, and inclusion, building cultural competence, advocacy, equity, and disproportionately impacted student access. As depicted in Figure 8 below, the codes were identified in the interviews and allowed the categorization of data that is essential to understanding servingness of Latinx students and provides a foundational standpoint to understand leadership profiles that serve Latinx and Hispanic students. This subtheme is conceptual core of answering the research question and is reflected in each of the following themes that construct a leader profile.

Figure 8

Subtheme Racial Consciousness

Note. Figure 8 depicts the codes identified in the interviews that reflect CCCPs’ racial consciousness as a subtheme.
One of the subthemes that emerged in understanding how CCCPs lead their institutions was raised through discussions of racial consciousness. Racial consciousness and the related topics of anti-racist, diversity and inclusion, cultural competence, advocacy, equity, and DI access as depicted in Figure 8 above, were raised across various interviews when addressing how CCCPs lead. Specifically, the awareness and acknowledgment of racial disparities and how race influences the unique experiences of Latinx students was a key element of CCCPs’ discussions, which informed how the CCCPs in this study conceptualize their role as a campus leader.

A president’s identity and positionality intersect, shaping their values and leadership styles. Reflective presidents with a deep understanding of themselves and their journey are better equipped to take intentional steps to make a meaningful difference on their campuses. In addition to their awareness of privilege, power dynamics, and racial identity, leaders expressed the influence of their identity on their leadership. In the following, the first of the major themes, identity, is discussed through examples that emerged from the data.

**Theme 1: Identity: Intersectionality and the HSI CCCP Experience**

In this section, the theme of identity will be discussed, specifically how it informs both the lens in which leaders lead and how they are perceived. During my interviews CCCPs gave specific examples of how race, gender, education, family background, immigration status, religion, abilities, LGBTQIA+ orientation, professional experiences, and opportunities were key factors in their identities which afforded them passion and fortitude to pursue the presidency at a CA Community College. Presidents often discussed where they came from as an avenue to shed light on who they are, their values, and what they stand for. Based on their identities and lived experiences, five presidents were explicit in their interviews that they never could have envisioned becoming a college president coming from experiences and families that faced many barriers. Their journeys had made it difficult for them to perceive themselves as entering a path
towards a community college presidency. The theme identity is depicted below in Figure 9, which shows codes that were identified through the CCCP interviews analysis. These identities intersect and inform CCCPs overall identity, establishing the first of four primary themes that emerged in this study.

**Figure 9**

*Identity Theme*

*Note.* Figure 9 depicts the various codes identified in CCCP interviews as the identity theme.

All CCCPs shared that they had a variety of professional experiences across the system from serving as faculty, serving in roles across student services, working in positions within Business office-Accounting-Administrative services, and overseeing instruction. Their experience along with key mentors helped to clear the pathway to the presidency. For some, it seemed that timing, such as the advancement, retirement, or resignation of former leaders, was important to their entry to taking on the role of president. The CCCPs shared experiences of resilience, power, and privilege based on their identities and how those identities colored their lived experiences, impacted the way they led, gained support, and directed important equity goals on the campus as an HSI.

**Professional Experiences.**

Professional experiences can shape leaders’ identity by exposing them to new challenges, people, and perspectives in building skills and knowledge, and learning how to navigate in diverse settings. One example of how professional experiences inform the way presidents lead is
the example provided by Ridge College president Dr. Oliver, who reflected on his experience as a young man working at a fast-food chain across the street from the college where he is now president. President Oliver values his early professional experience and shares it with students to connect with them and show that he started from humble beginnings and was not always a college president wearing a suit and tie walking across campus. It is important for President Oliver to feel relatable and accessible to his diverse student population. President Oliver, a white, 6-foot-tall former athlete, is aware that his stature may be intimidating, especially given the current political climate. He is intentional about building relationships with students and employees across campus and works to de-hierarchize his role and dismantle power differentials to build authentic connections. He is interested in making himself relatable and accessible through sharing his early career experiences and he hopes he can inspire others to see that they can strive for more than their current situation and see him as a role model.

*Family Background.*

Some presidents drew upon their family background, which informs their identity to connect with students and demonstrate empathy for their experiences and challenges. President Martin, a white female president from Forrest College, was passionate to share how she has personally witnessed how education changed the trajectory of her family. Dr. Martin states:

I understand what education has done for me, and my family. My grandmother picked cotton and now I'm a college president. How does that happen? Education! My core values centered around the fact that education is what sets people free. And it is my mission to make sure that everyone has access to this intrinsic sense of freedom.

President Martin shared her personal experience as coming from a family that worked in agriculture doing hard labor. She feels hopeful that her students can find opportunities to change their lives through education and hopes students to see themselves in her journey and be inspired that education can be a liberatory force in their lives.
Similarly, President Kabila from Valley View College gave a personal glimpse of how her identity inspires her work in education. She is a Latina president who also came from humble beginnings. She was frustrated by witnessing the discrimination and lack of humanity her family was treated with when she was young. These experiences propelled her to pursue education and challenge stereotypes that had the ability to limit her potential. Dr. Kabila shared her story:

My mother was a domestic, cleaning homes. My father was a gardener. What has shaped my values as a social justice educator is the experiences, I had watched my parents navigate a new experience in this country, of oftentimes being dismissed, and discounted, and not treated with the respect and the value that I believe all human beings deserve. That started my journey. I was a community college student and became a college counselor because it was a college counselor who helped me. And I've often said, people have believed in me so much more than I believed in myself... [my counselor] believed in me so much that they tricked me into believing in myself. And that's what's happened to me as a community college student. I wanted to do the same thing and have that kind of impact on other students.

Dr. Kabila shared that she was able to advance in her career and build stability in her life through key mentors and attending college. She began to see herself in a new light of what could be possible and explored career opportunities that built a pathway in higher education that moved her career to the CCC presidency. As a president of color, President Kabila’s story is important and builds connection with students who have similar family dynamics. She provides hope that despite their current circumstances and family histories, students can uplift themselves and pursue a new path by engaging in education. Her experience can also energize faculty and staff who serve students directly, inspiring them to see themselves as key relationships that support students in realizing their potential and pursuing unprecedented opportunities.

President of Great Basin College, Dr. Calderón, is also a Latina leader. When interviewed Dr. Calderón had only been in the president role for a few months after serving a decade as a VP at one of the largest CCs in CA. During her interview, she was passionate about being a change-agent to create systemic change in the community college system. She was emboldened from her
personal experiences facing discrimination as a college student and recognizing Latinx stories had been left out of education. She acknowledged the painful family lineages of prejudice and discrimination, recognizing the vestiges of these racist and exclusionary systems her students are still facing today. Dr. Calderón engages her identity and familial experiences as a granddaughter of migrant farmworkers who attended segregated Mexican schools. Raised by a single mother who understood how the social system was designed to funnel students into the lowest-paying jobs, she was inspired to advocate for educational justice. She stands in solidarity with her students because she recognizes that she was once one of them. She shared her experiences being a first-generation college student going through a colonial education model that left out Hispanics and Latinx voices and how she is inspired to bring social justice to her leadership:

The curriculum and the pedagogy were developed with the intention of exclusion. I'm the third generation born in this country, but the first generation to go to college, and that was by design from this– from our– country. The values I carry with me for social justice, racial equity, inclusion, liberation are the values that I bring with me every day to my role as President.

Dr. Calderón discussed that despite being a third generation American, she still recognizes the ways her family had been discriminated against, discounted, and excluded. She credits her mother as the one who understood that college was a pathway to break the cycle of poverty and generate agency to pursue new pathways for stability. She details her mother’s wisdom,

It [education] disrupted generational poverty, it was the antidote to the racism, sexism, and classism that we experienced as people who had to rely on, you know, public relief to make it. I've seen the transformation in our lives, not only financially, but I've seen that the things my mom told me an education can help do, it happened. She said, ‘You know, with an education, you can use your voice to change things, right? You can use books, instead of fists, like I had to… If you have your education, you can travel you can have options.’ She had to get married right away. And with me and my sister, she always told us we could make our own way. She [my mother] was always just raising us with wisdom. Community college helped solidify that wisdom, it extended my sense of family in that way, the very nature of community college is that we do really become a part of a family.
Thus, Dr. Calderón’s commitment to giving back has led her to a career in higher education, culminating in her presidency, which is grounded in values of inclusion, visibility, and access. President Calderón is a passionate trailblazer who is committed to dismantling colonial education to create a more inclusive community college. She is explicit in her call to action to pursue “educational justice through dismantling system oppression.” Dr. Calderón’s family background and influence of her mother is the foundation for her passion to serve and pursue racial equity at her HSI.

**Education & Immigration Status.**

President Barrett from Desert College is a first-generation college graduate who grew up in poverty, being raised by her teenage mother who had no formal education. She faced many challenges, including her mother's undocumented status, cycle of deportation, and the lack of educational resources available to her. As a Spanish speaker, there were no ELL or dual immersion classes when she started school. She was pipelined into the severely disabled classes due to not speaking English. Despite her circumstances, she persevered, recognizing the value of education as a path out of poverty. She became an "academic machine," graduating from high school with honors and earning scholarships to the most prestigious colleges in the country. President Barrett is now the president of Desert College, where she is committed to helping students from all backgrounds achieve their educational goals. She shares her story with students, a role model for resilience, perseverance, and problem-solving, which have led her to success as a CCCP. She inspires the college community, especially students, by exemplifying what is possible when one overcomes adversity to achieve their dreams. The nuance of presidents integrating their own identity into their work is evident in their commitment to make connections and support students.
**LGBTQIA+ Identity.**

President Rogers' commitment to supporting students by challenging racism directly and moving his campus towards equity is evident in his nuanced approach to integrating his identity into his work. He believes that "equity is a lens by which we do all of the other work around student success and access." He has evolved in his understanding of equity over time, and now recognizes that his privilege as a cis-white man gives him a responsibility to advocate for marginalized populations. Cis refers to cisgender, a person who identifies as their assigned gender at birth (Jourian, 2014; Worthen, 2021). Cis white males are often seen as the default or norm in society and this dynamic is often used in discussions of gender and privilege. President Rogers feels a sense of obligation to leverage his minoritized identity as a gay man to amplify his advocacy for equity. He believes that LGBTQIA+ leaders have a unique understanding of the importance of equity work, and he is committed to building bridges with his students and college constituents by connecting his personal identity and lived experiences to the identities of the people they serve. President Rogers said:

I feel like that equity goal has sharpened for me in the last 10 years, I think when I was first teaching, I was incredibly naïve. Now I make fun of the people who say they're colorblind, but I was one of those in the early days. You have experiences, evolve, and your understanding makes you a little bit less ignorant than you were before with each year of work and your life… [Also,] I'm LGBTQIA+, I'm a gay cis man. And I feel like I have an obligation to be a little extra sensitive to my white privilege, and to what the other parts of my life that have been non-minoritized have given me and to recognize that other folks who have not had those opportunities deserve an advocate. I see myself as that ally and advocate in a way that I hope is an obligation for most LGBTQIA+ identifying leaders. And I talk to a lot of LGBTQIA+ leaders… it's amazing commonality, we all feel just a little bit more obligated to move up equity issues in our priority list because of where we've been in our lives.

President Rogers’ integration of his identities speaks to the complexities and intersectional identities of leaders. In this example, Dr. Rogers leverages his minoritized identity to amplify his advocacy for equity, recognizing that his privilege gives him a responsibility to advocate for
marginalized student populations. He also feels obligated to build bridges with his students and college constituents by connecting his personal identity and lived experiences to the identities of the people he serves.

President Rogers' commitment to being an ally and role model is evident in his choice to be out and transparent about his sexual identity and experiences. His choice to share that aspect of his identity helps to reduce feelings of isolation and marginalization for LGBTQIA+ students, staff, and faculty and creates a more supportive community for everyone. Overall, President Rogers is an example showing how presidents can be open, honest, and vulnerable to share their full identities to make a positive impact and creates a more inclusive and equitable environment for everyone. President Rogers shares how he leverages the aspect of his identity that is minoritized to amplify his level of advocacy in his leadership. He at once recognizes his status as a cis-white-man and the duality of his identity as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. President Rogers feels a strong obligation to prioritize equity work through his influence as a CCCP. President Roger's commitment to being an ally as a cis white man who also understands discrimination based on his LGBTQIA+ identity can raise awareness of systemic racism and other forms of inequity, making him a role model for educating their communities about the challenges faced by marginalized groups. This can lead to a more informed and engaged community that is better equipped to work towards equity. Building trust with his community by being transparent and authentic about his own identities and experiences shows that he is willing to be vulnerable and put himself out there, making it more likely that people will feel comfortable coming forward with their own concerns and ideas.

The CCCPs' leadership approach is deeply rooted in their personal identities. This is evident in the shared examples they provided related to the theme of identity, and further
supported by the consistent pattern emerging from their interviews. Participants' reflections on their role demonstrate how their personal identities significantly influence their embodiment of the CCCP role. Moreover, individuals with a stronger sense of self-actualization in their identities displayed a heightened awareness of effective leadership within an HSI context, acknowledging the crucial role of identity in educational settings. Notably, racial identity plays a significant role in shaping the lived experiences of leaders. The next section will delve into how presidents perceive the importance of adaptability in serving their diverse HSI campuses.

**Theme 2: Adaptive Competencies: Informing Leadership Actions & Behaviors**

This section discusses adaptive competencies, which CCCPs identified as the most important leadership skills for informing their work in a constantly changing environment as identified through their interviews. Adaptive competencies allow individuals to grow and thrive in complex and uncertain situations. CCCPs highlighted authenticity, transparency, empathy, vulnerability, humility, communication, listening, self-reflection, integrity (such as a moral compass or North Star), adaptability, critical thinking, and problem-solving as some of the many adaptive competencies they rely on to successfully lead their campuses. This section will explore some of these adaptive competencies in more detail through the CCCPs' narratives. In Figure 10 below various Adaptive Competences are identified that were all connected under this theme from the CCCPs interviews. This is the second of the four themes which emerged from the transcript analysis.
Figure 10

Theme Adaptive Competencies

![Adaptive Competencies Diagram]

* Denotes that the theme also falls within the racial consciousness category.

Note. Figure 10 depicts the various codes identified in CCCP interviews related to the theme Adaptive Competencies.

The Authenticity Imperative: Leading Beyond Hierarchy and Authority

Authenticity is a key adaptive competency in leadership, as emphasized by all presidents interviewed. They discussed how authentic leaders build trust by being honest and transparent about their values and beliefs, and by being willing to be vulnerable. Authenticity can be described as acting on one’s values or being true to oneself. Being authentic is an iterative and reflective process of conversation requiring leaders to identify and act from their perceived values and recognizing how one’s history, relationships with others, and aspirations impact leading from an authentic lens (Freeman & Auster, 2011). CCCPs in these interviews demonstrated ways in which they were reflective and self-aware, and their willingness to constantly learn and grow (Stoeckel & Davies, 2007). They build rapport with members of the college because they are accessible, and people feel like they know who they are and what they stand for.

The CCCPs interviewed discussed authenticity as a high-value competency that aids communication and relationship-building, particularly with students. Authentic leadership is driven by a desire to be honest and genuine, and it breeds trust in relationships (Freeman & Auster, 2011). In the interviews, some white presidents acknowledged that there is a natural
inclination for distrust of leadership, especially in hierarchical power structures which draws on
the previous section on identity, power, and privilege. Based on the presidents' examples from
the interviews, CCCPs recognize that they need to be accessible and show their genuineness to
challenge the perception that people in power may be inauthentic and untrustworthy (Gearin,
2017). Authenticity breeds trust, which the CCCPs identified is instrumental for achieving goals
related to racial justice, equity, and student success, and to create a more inclusive and
welcoming campus environment.

When discussing authenticity, Dr. Avila a Latino, president at Baja college, who has a
long history at his institution shared:

Before I became president, I had already established relationships with people over my
twenty-plus years at the campus. So, for me, there are times people said, ‘Oh, you can't
do that, you need to be wearing your sport coat. You can't be there with just a polo shirt
today.’ And usually, I will try to make sure that I'm having my suit and my tie and
representing that professional image. But sometimes I can be more casual in the way I
present and talk to people. At times, someone will say at events that that message wasn't
formal enough. But then when I talk to everyone else, it’s like ‘No, you are your
authentic self.’ And for me, I think, how can I communicate authentically? How can I be
seen? And I feel that people see me as ‘He is speaking from the heart, he is speaking the
truth. He is not a polished politician that's saying the right things just to appease.’

Dr. Avila's reflection on authenticity highlights the importance of being true to oneself, even
when facing pressure to conform to traditional notions of professionalism. This may be more
challenging for new presidents without established relationships on campus. However, for
President Avila, being congruent with his core values builds trust in his new role. The findings of
this study coincide with the literature, showing that presidents experience a tension between
being fully authentic and being perceived as presidential (Eddy, 2005; Hassan et al., 2009;
Neumann & Bensimon, 1990). President Avila is fortunate to have a long history in higher
education administration and established many previous relationships with campus
administrators. This helped him gain the trust of his community, whereas others might be
challenged to find a more delicate balance when addressing their institutional stakeholders. Authenticity is a critical competency for leaders, as evidenced by the consistent findings of this study and in the American Association of Community College, *Competencies for Community College Leaders* (2005). Presidents need to be authentic to build trusting relationships with their teams, motivate them, and inspire them to follow their vision.

As noted in the literature review, presidents play a significant role in setting campus agendas, especially in supporting and serving Latinx students and students of color (Cole & Harper, 2017). Their success in achieving these agendas relies on fostering mutually respectful relationships across the campus (Eddy, 2013; McNair et al., 2011). Other campus presidents similarly alluded to this concept, sharing how being in alignment with one's identity and origins is at the core of creating authentic connections because these do not change even as titles are promoted and levels of education advance.

President Kabila emphasizes the importance of authentic leadership, acknowledging that people will eventually be able to see through any attempts to be someone you are not. She states: “But it's learning to recognize the importance of being an authentic leader, being true to the person that I am. When you try to be something you're not, eventually that mask falls off.” Dr. Kabila identifies authentic leaders as those who are true to themselves and their values. She emphasizes that leaders are better off maintaining an authentic approach from the start because presenting a façade will inevitably lead to the exposure of the individual for their true qualities. To meet the challenges of social justice and equity work, a president's stakeholders need to believe that their leader is coming to the work with integrity and good intentions and truly holds the values of equity work in their heart. Leaders need followers to help them achieve their equity and confront social justice issues. The campus needs to be motivated by a leader they
believe in and should feel that the president is authentically committed to doing equity work (Gearin, 2017). As demonstrated by the examples in the following sections, many of the presidents were direct in discussing the relationship between adaptive competencies and leading with transparency by building on their lived experiences and identity to inform their role as a leader.

**Transparency: The Art of Leading in a Complex World**

Another prevalent theme was transparency. President Quinn talks about the intersection of transparency, engagement, and trust providing examples on how this shows up in his leadership:

I am big on transparency; I have always been interested in how we function best. And so being able to help people not only see the big picture, but to get their perspective of what they think. What is the issue at hand is or what the big picture is, from their perspective. I do this while understanding there's relational power and get a clear picture of what their expectations are, what is their understanding and what is their knowledge level. If there's a gap, I ask myself, do I need to fill in a knowledge gap so that we can get to the next step? Or is there a misperception or misunderstanding, do we need to provide more education and professional development so that folks can move from what one might see as dogmatic or self-serving kind of interests. How do we need to move people to a place where they might serve others. Sometimes leadership is figuring out who do I need to get on my team so that we can move on. It is part of being savvy enough with the right message to figure that out and continue to engage people. It's really about transparency. It's about engaging people. So that folks have a very good sense of where we are, what our values are, what our concerns are, what the issues are.

President Quinn went on to provide some specific examples from his campus during the uncertainty of the pandemic and the George Floyd murder. He goes on to say:
During Covid, I recognized we needed to inform people to reduce their anxiety by consistently engaging in dialogue through various channels allowing people to be heard and informed. People understood and knew that they were part of the decision-making process as we were having virtual weekly campus updates and discussions. Then the George Floyd murder and the whole, social justice movement, we brought folks from across the institution to address the issue creating social justice work groups. One group was working on diversifying the curriculum. Another one was working with the Student Services wing after it became clear that some students of color did not feel welcomed in some places or departments at the college, and we wanted students to feel supported. Another work group focused on professional development to support our staff and our faculty around DEI issues. We set up tri-chairs for the work groups...there's a student leader, there's a faculty leader, there's an administrator, and there's a classified leader in each of those groups of about eight or nine people. This structure allowed us to dig deep, and when there was opposition to something DEI related, we had enough people addressing and talking about it from the various roles of institution which kept people engaged...We have a culture of high communication. So much so that I must step in and say enough talking we can't just keep talking we need to make plans. But the dialogue is important to keep engagement so that people understand that we're at that inflection point through these conversations, and something needs to happen. Communication is about being transparent. It's about engaging people. It's about creating channels for getting feedback and giving that information. It's about helping to locate and identify dissent, or disaffection. When there are opposing viewpoints we can bring those viewpoints into discussions, and we don't have people feel isolated in a silo.

President Quinn from Peak College is committed to responsive and inclusive leadership, especially during times of change and upheaval. He believes in two-way communication and transparency, and he values the input of all members of the campus community, including marginalized groups. Quinn recognizes that his role is to keep his finger on the pulse of the campus and to facilitate conversations that lead to buy-in and engagement. He believes that the campus needs to feel heard and valued, especially during times of crisis. Dr. Quinn is committed to dialogue, he also understands that there comes a time when action is needed. He is committed to using his role as president to make decisions that are in the best interests of the campus community, even if they are difficult.

Though most presidents' discussions of authenticity are optimistic and relational, there remains a tension between being authentic while respecting the boundaries of confidentiality and
discernment while working with topics at the executive level that are not meant for public consumption. President Hernandez, who did not mince words in his interview and shared a very direct approach to race conversations, discussed this tension openly:

I think in leadership, there's, I don't want to say a false narrative, because I think transparency matters. But there's this kind of unrealistic, I think that's the word, an unrealistic expectation of transparency on matters that you're not able to be transparent on. And oftentimes, those become the tension points.

This quote reveals that leaders need to be transparent, but they must also be realistic about what they can and cannot share. When there is an unrealistic expectation of transparency, it can lead to tension and distrust. President Hernandez's comments raise questions about the relationship between transparency and authenticity. Is transparency a requirement of authenticity? If, as a leader, you cannot be transparent in your role, can you lead authentically? Considering these questions and the additional discussions with CCCPs, can provide a deeper understanding of the role of transparency and authenticity in the pursuit of social justice goals (Trent, 2016). The role of CCCP requires leaders to balance the need to be authentic with the need to protect confidentiality and have discernment. This requires a sophisticated leadership style that balances authenticity and transparency, which is critical if leaders want to be seen as trustworthy and credible. However, what are the experiences of presidents when they do not feel fully aligned with their external persona and their internal narrative? The next sub-theme will explore the challenges that presidents experience when they feel disconnected and not fully authentic.

**Identity and Leadership: The Masks We Wear**

One of the most surprising subthemes to emerge from the transcript analysis was the use of the terms "chameleon" and "imposter syndrome" by both white presidents and presidents of color alike. While both men and women used these terms, they did so in very different ways. President Emerson from Palm College discussed feelings of imposter syndrome in relation to
leading the diverse college during the time of unrest, questioning if he is the right person for the job at this time. It is notable that President Emerson refers to serving at a “diverse college” rather than explicitly stating the HSI designation of his institution, which provides insight that like other CCCPs interviewed, he does not recognize the identity of his school being directly grounded in the MSI designation. The emphasis on feelings of imposter syndrome or chameleon-like nature of the school within President Emerson’s reflection highlights how CCCPs opt into the uses of equity-based language to refer to their campus constituency in lieu of sharing the MSI designation, allowing them to fluctuate the presentation of their identity to the audience they are addressing. At an HBCU, leaders would not get away with casually interchanging their reference to the school as Black serving versus diverse, but at HSIs, the CCCPs interviewed for this study seem to use flexible language adapted to situations such as securing funding or presenting their campus to a wider audience.

Dr. Kabila, a Latina president from Valley View College also shared that despite her many years of experience, she still faced feelings of being an imposter when she started in her role as president. She recounted how she felt at her first address to the college as president:
I've had a long experience as an administrator at Community College. And yet you stand in front of this [audience], stand on the stage and the creepy feeling of that imposter syndrome comes and overwhelms me. And I'm thinking, what am I going to tell this campus? Should I tell them about all the experiences I've had to make sure that they know that they made the right decision? Do I describe my resume? Do I talk about guided pathways or whatever the legislation was? ...no, talk about who you are, why this work is important for you. So, I, in my first opening day at the college, I shared my journey, and how Community College has changed my life. It changed the lives of my brothers and sisters, my family, and our extended family, because higher education became part of the norm. And I said, and I know that you sitting in this room are here for a reason you have a story and how important your story is, and how that connects with our students…I was so nervous. And it was very vulnerable, because I also did not want to stand behind the safety of the podium and just say presidential words. I really wanted people to see me for who I am. And I figured either they liked me, or they don't and that just, it doesn't matter. This is who I am. …And after that I had a lot of our faculty members and employees come up and say oh my god, my family's from Jalisco or my family comes from Vietnam, and I know what it means to translate or pay bills for your parents. With these comments, I thought, you know, that was the right choice. But it's, it's nerve racking because you make yourself very vulnerable. But in doing so, you also give license to others to do the same as you. That's, again, that's sharing your journey as an important piece of leadership.

Dr. Kabila did not identify her gender or race as part of experiencing “imposter syndrome,” explicitly, yet she refers to imposter syndrome before sharing how she opened up to her campus about her personal background to connect. Like what was shared earlier in this chapter regarding her family background, it is plausible that there is a link between her lived experiences and her inability to imagine that she would be a college president. The feelings of imposter syndrome that Dr. Kabila described having when she first took the job prompted her to reflect on how to best connect with her campus. Rather than share a list of resume items and professional experiences, she talked about her community college experience and what this position means to her. The immense pressure to be all things to all people, and the desire to be authentic can be so strong that CCCPs, like Dr. Kabila, can feel unprepared or undeserving of the president role, despite having a successful career and exceptional achievements. The example shared by Dr. Kabila shows how imposter syndrome and feelings of inadequacy challenge CCCPs as they enter
the position of campus leader. However, Dr. Kabila’s points also highlight how leaders who emphasize who they are outside of the title president can create meaningful connections to their campus constituents by sharing their personal journeys.

Despite being at the CEO level, there is a sense of humility and reflection by presidents who consider whether they are the best leader in the current moment and climate to meet equity goals, specifically evaluating whether they have the capacity to motivate the college to achieve those goals. President Martin from Forrest College shared, “there's always a little bit of, you know, imposter syndrome. Why am I talking about this, do I have the cultural capital to lead in this way?” In the case of leadership at HSIs, cultural capital is the bridge to breed trust and to therefore mobilize successful leadership grounded in the campus climate.

President Avila from Baja College, talked about the need to be "chameleon-like" to be successful in a diverse environment to find ways to be with the “in” group. In the following quote, he described his experience reconciling his identity as a Cuban-Mexican American in different contexts such as amongst family to give further context to his experiences in his role as a leader in higher education:

Chameleon is a term I've used. And then after a while, I started thinking, then I started feeling bad, myself, personally. I feel I'm kind of like, ‘Oh, wait a minute, chameleon is, does that mean you're trying to hide?’ I feel that I sometimes, I have to code switch depending on the context I am in. When I am with family, it’s ok to be one way, but that doesn’t work in other settings, and I would feel embarrassed for being that way with family. I started to think, ‘No, I need to embrace that.’ Chameleon, is a tactic I use depending on which group I'm in. However, the downside always is when you use this tactic, you feel you're not white enough for this group, but not Mexican enough for this group, because I don’t speak Spanish. So, either way, I will never really be accepted.

In this instance, the term chameleon suggests that one needs to adapt to different circumstances to address the unique cultures and backgrounds to be better positioned to build relationships with
people from all walks of life. However, it is clear from the response that there is still a sense of uncertainty as not being fully authentic and not knowing where exactly one fits.

President Emerson from Palm College describes his approach to engaging his community, which deconstructs his feelings of imposter syndrome leading a minority serving institution as a white president. CCCPs recognize how their identity can impact relationships for better or for worse and that self-reflection can help leaders to be more sensitive to noticing the experiences of the communities that they serve. President Emerson discussed his malleable approach to leading, which is constantly informed by current events:

I have to stop and listen to multiple viewpoints; I have to get out in the community. I go to the center of where the Black population lives which is part of my service area. And so, I get out and I'll go to events there, I'll go to black churches. And make sure that on my advisory council, there are representatives from all the areas. I read, I just finished reading uncomfortable, uncomfortable conversations with a Black man. I try to expose myself to what the kind of lives my students might have, understanding that I don't take a metro into buses to get here, I live 10 minutes away in a pretty high rent district, because I didn't want to drive in traffic… I try to be sensitive to [student experiences] and understand when I'm talking to students, they may perceive me a certain way, and I need to be respectful of that… I'm constantly aware of what I represent, and how they might perceive me, and how I can make sure I try to, to respect where they're coming from. I have students living eight people in a hotel room. I can't comprehend it, but I can respect it's their world. And it's a constant state of becoming on these days, I feel just so stupid, that I am not going to get a head. Then there are waves of thinking, I'm not the right person for the job now, because maybe they need somebody that reflects the diversity of their community. Then I think, wait a minute, I have a wealth of experience here. That is helping the school. I mean, I've done pretty good at fundraising and somebody with less experience may not have had. To be a college president, you must be a little arrogant, because you have to actually think you can do the job. Even though you may be having a huge imposter complex. You still have to present that. And so, then I think, ‘Okay, I am contributing. I need to set aside the sense of imposter.’

These comments about imposter syndrome and adapting like a chameleon show that while presidents reported that they value authenticity, they still face tensions while trying to enact their roles in various spaces and circumstances that demand their leadership. In Dr. Garcia’s (2023) *Transforming Hispanic Serving Institutions for Equity and Justice* she states that “White men,
too, must lead for equity, justice, and liberation” (p. 142). The reflection of white president privilege is coupled with their questioning of whether they are the right “face” for the moment to lead in a time to close equity gaps, dismantle colonial and discriminatory policies and procedures that create barriers for Latinx students, and to center the most vulnerable and marginalized students in achieving their goals. Most of the white CCCPs interviewed saw themselves as instrumental in moving equity goals by activating their privilege and political agendas. However, some of the interviews with white presidents proved that while they acknowledged their white privilege and the power differentials that create a barrier between them and students, the presidents still faced challenges leveraging their whiteness to disrupt oppressive forces in solidarity with the Latinx and students of color they serve. Thus, self-reflection is a critical praxis for white CCCPs to enhance their abilities to inform their leadership from a place of allyship that is grounded in the commitment to serve Latinx students at HSIs.

**Self-Reflection: Looking in the Mirror to See More Clearly**

President Friedman, white president from Canyon College recounts an impactful experience that shaped his view on diversity and inclusion when he was working in student discipline:

> When I was first working and I had to do student discipline, I hated that job. I was talking with a female, Latina. And I said to her, ‘You're not even looking at me that is so disrespectful.’ She corrected me and said, ‘You're not understanding that in my culture to look at you while you're lecturing me is disrespectful. So, I'm actually respecting you.’ I was like, ‘Whoa,’ I just had to check myself. And I was like, it just was so humbling. And I was like, from that point on I cannot project, one cannot assume. In that one little moment, it triggered a lot of other thinking in the way that I approach things and looked at students. It was one of the things that shook me to my core. And it's interesting, it wasn't a class. It wasn't anything major, but it became major to me. I think it probably had as big an impact on having the ability to self-reflect going forward and modify the way I perceived and interacted with students. And even though I thought I was a champion of diversity, and empowering and, advancing economic mobility through education, I realized I have so much learning [to do], and I've been at this thirty-five years, and I'm still learning every day.
This experience had a profound impact on President Friedman and led him to become more aware of the importance of cultural humility over the course of his career challenging his cultural assumptions. These examples reveal that these white presidents are being self-reflective to understand their own biases and assumptions and acknowledge how their position as president and positionality as a white person impacts their interactions and leadership.

**Race-Conscious or Colorblind: Community College Presidents and Racial Politics**

The following section furthers the discussions on race and provides insights on how race-conscious presidents enact their leadership. The section will also explore how presidents perceive their responsibility in efforts for racial justice and equity. The discussion of racial justice demonstrates a clear motivation of why presidents lead and what motivates them to lead a diverse campus. Race consciousness is the awareness of the ways in which race shapes our lives, individually and collectively. It is the ability to recognize and understand the impact of racism on our own experiences and the experiences of others as a social practice rather than a construct (Warmington, 2009). It is also the ability to use this knowledge to challenge racism and promote racial equity.

Adaptive competencies are the skills and knowledge that enable CCCPs to thrive in their campus leadership to address the needs of a complex educational context. Adaptive competencies are the abilities that allow leaders to learn new things, adapt to new situations, and solve problems creatively (Bensimon, 1987; Morris, 2017; Schoemaker et al., 2013; ). Race consciousness is an adaptive competency because it allows CCCPs to navigate the multifaceted and often challenging dynamics of race relations (Shankar-Brown, 2021; Wilkinson, 2022). Race consciousness helps CCCPs to understand the root causes of racism, identify and challenge
racist policies and practices, and build relationships with people from different racial backgrounds to achieve college goals.

Throughout conversations with CCCPs, the discussion of racial justice led to conversations about themes such as, "using my voice," "racial outcomes," and "racial equity and liberation." The theme of racial justice came up across multiple interviews, in which this theme was addressed and was voiced by all presidents of color in a clear and direct manner using the term racial justice. Racial justice came up for those presidents who mentioned it in the opening question, “What experiences or values inform how you approach your role as a community college campus president?” The participants were candid about how racial justice frames their leadership and their willingness to lean into courageous conversations about race and dismantling systems that discriminate against Latinx, Hispanic and students of color.

President Kabila from Valley View College alludes to her first experience feeling seen within an academic space, which inspired her to want to give back:

And for me, what has shaped my values as really a social justice educator is the experiences that I had watching my parents navigate a new experience in this country, oftentimes being dismissed, discounted. And not treated with the respect and the value that I believe all human beings deserved. And so that started my journey as a community college student, then I became a college counselor, and I became a college counselor because it was a college counselor who helped me. And I've often said this, that people have believed in me so much more than I believed in myself. And this isn't me, this is not my phrase.

The personal lived experiences, such as the one shared above, within the context of the current political climate indicate the ways CCCPs align their vision with the practice of helping students and ensuring positive student experience to support them to achieve great things. The core mission of the CC space is to provide open access to anyone seeking to further their education. To have a president that is aligned with that mission and having had experiences of how
education has elevated their own trajectory and that of their families makes it not only a mission of the institution, but also grounds their commitments with a personal bent.

President Rogers of Coastal College said that before the pandemic, college presidents were focused on external initiatives like outreach and industry partnerships. However, the pandemic shifted the focus to internal work, with presidents becoming "the comforters, the healers, and mediators-in-chief of their institutions." President Rogers also shared that the presidency is currently less stable than ever before. He noted that the typical tenure for college presidents has decreased to less than three years, making the presidency vulnerable when having to confront polarizing topics such as race and immigration (Weissman, 2022). This makes presidents more hesitant to take a stand on issues that could alienate their constituents or jeopardize their jobs. President Rogers said, “One false move, and you're out,” which moves people in leadership roles to play it safe. President Rogers leans into the equity work and highlights that if you are not taking risks, then you probably are not doing real equity work. For example, President Rogers addressed the misappropriation of a stereotypical Latino icon on campus that had been the school's mascot. As a white president, he recognized that he could make a difference right away by choosing to change the mascot to something more culturally appropriate and challenge those who felt the previous mascot was part of the tradition and history of the college. President Rogers added:

The power of small minorities to create resistance and influence trustees, I feel, is greater today than it was a few years ago. And I think that's a sad and significant way in which the job has changed over the years, leaving a lot of CEOs gun shy and coasting toward retirement. I'll be frank with you; those presidents aren’t really doing a lot of dangerous work to bring DEI work forward on their campuses and make changes.

President Rogers felt more protected in his position and felt more confident to make meaningful changes on his campus prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, recent political divisions, and the
contemporary hostility within the social climate related to making equity driven changes focused on racialized justice. Despite the importance of taking risks and making big changes to address inequities, such as the cultural misappropriation shared in his example, President Rogers notes his observation of how other presidents seem to be playing it safe to appease the masses and sees that other presidents are less likely to put themselves in a vulnerable position to do social justice work that could improve experiences and outcomes for Latinx and minority students. As a CC president, President Rogers is critical of not doing “dangerous work” in their leadership to fulfill the mission of community colleges towards reducing barriers, increasing success, and ensuring that all students feel that they belong. President Rogers utilizes his position as a white male with a greater sensitivity to those vulnerable or minoritized groups who have experienced discrimination and sees himself as an active agent in making things better as a community college leader. Rather than return to the pre-pandemic style of externally focused leadership, President Rogers subscribes to a leadership ideal that emphasizes equity initiatives challenging the established order in pursuit of equity and social justice goals even at the potential cost of losing his position.

One president, President Oliver, who identifies as white, focused on respect for humankind. President Oliver, a white male from Ridge College who has been in his role for ten years, was more uncomfortable to speak directly about issues related to race, as captured in the following quote:

I think it's all for so many of us. And for me, it's an educational journey. Being human, there have been stages where I was able to talk about race or ethnicity in an intentional way. Though, I think it's the right thing. It kind of creates butterflies. That's a hard topic. It's like, how can I relate coming from my own identity [white]? Will others I am called to serve accept me? And what I'm learning is that being authentic is a priority in my desire to serve people and I do this by being willing to be a lifelong learner. I recognize that I don't know everything, but I'm interested in learning and recognize that words and actions matter.
President Oliver’s words exemplify an insecurity of speaking directly to issues of race because he is white, and thus he focuses more on “authentic” leadership and the humility of wanting to learn. Nevertheless, President Oliver notes that his words and his leadership have weight.

Alternatively, President Lee shared her commitment to put herself out there to have conversations about race that may make others uncomfortable in an effort to achieve goals of equity for her students. She recognizes that her own identity as an Asian woman impacts how she is perceived as a leader and president, and that people interpret her as having to bring these issues to light. President Lee stated:

I don't shy away from those conversations any longer. I learned a long time ago that, you know, people have a lot of stereotypes about what an Asian American woman is supposed to be like right. Originally, you know a lot of people thought I would be docile, that I would be quiet, that I would do their bidding, etc. Down the line, only to come to find out that I was none of those things that I had never really been, and they would be shocked, appalled, and upset because they thought they could control me, and I was not controllable.

The topic of race came up in other interviews, which emphasized how conversations about race have evolved from focusing on being politically correct and inclusive to acknowledging that serving a diverse population requires us to speak directly about the topic of race. CCCP, Dr. Hernandez from Shoreline College similarly discussed how race is at the core of their leadership agenda and stated:

I'm unapologetically race conscious. And that's different than just being equity minded, and/or equity driven. Like I said, I started with my values being rooted in social and racial justice. And so, for me being a race conscious leader, I think looks different than other leaders, and being really conscious is more than just disaggregating your data and looking at your data through the lens of race and ethnicity, but it's really looking at your data through the lens of race and ethnicity and then asking what are the barriers specific to different racial groups that we have either upheld or reinforced?

Dr. Hernandez used the term, “race-conscious leadership,” meaning, it is not enough to simply be aware of racial disparities, but that we must also take action to address them. The CCCP’s use
of the term "race conscious" acknowledges the reality of racial disparities, but it does not essentialize race. Instead, race-conscious leadership centers the experience of Latinx as essential to being a Hispanic Serving Institution. Aligning all aspects of leadership through centralizing the experiences of Latinx students and the HSI identity can be effective towards reducing barriers that students face in their pursuit of academic success. Dr. Hernandez represents a reputable CCCP within the sample because his community college has received recognition as one of the best HSIs in the United States (Uncited to maintain privacy of participant). As the quote from Dr. Hernandez shows, adopting a race-conscious leadership approach that values Latinx students and the HSI designation as core to the institutional mission demonstrates what it means to be truly serving.

CCCP Hernandez's framework is a powerful call to action for leaders at HSIs to combat the invisibility of marginalized groups and focus on the needs of students who are historically vulnerable to not persisting. By centering the experiences and needs of Latinx students, leaders can make their campuses more inclusive and affirming for all students. Hernandez confronts the deliberate choices that leaders make to talk about their institutions through a race lens, and challenges them to be more intentional about creating more equitable and justice-oriented learning environments for all. President Hernandez explains that race is fundamentally part of every conversation and sees himself as a race-conscious leader. Therefore, race is being used as the call to action to reduce barriers that Latinx students face.

Historically, presidents have had to be more nuanced while speaking about race to appease all constituents, community members, funders and not to offend anyone being as politically correct and generic as possible and did not specifically acknowledge their HSI identity (Cole & Harper, 2017; Contreras et al., 2008). However, President Hernandez centers race and
puts it at the core of their leadership approach. His lived experiences allow him to lean into narratives of race in a clear and deliberate way that represents a shift from previous generations of presidents at community colleges. By utilizing a race conscious lens to address and pursue the college goals, President Hernandez can have more targeted conversations based on the data and the specific demographic populations who need support to close the gaps. Dr. Hernandez emphasizes disaggregating the data in a race conscious way, focusing in on the disparities in outcomes allowing for interventions that can meet the needs of the specific population effected to close the gap directly.

President Rogers shared his favorite quote from President Ed Bush from Northern California regarding equity work. He said, “If you don't feel like your job is in danger, you're not doing equity work.” President Rogers continues:

And I think that's true of so many things, but particularly equity work. If you're not taking those risks, you're probably not doing that work. But the risks are higher now. You don’t get the leeway you used to get for making a wrong move.

President Rogers provided the following example regarding how the climate has changed in being able to expedite necessary equity work:

There are things I was able to accomplish in the first year of my presidency, like changing our mascot the Gaucho from culturally misappropriated, that had been graphically denoted as a Latino flying cowboy, angry with a thick mustache and smoke coming out of his nostrils. I can change this and make something that is more culturally sensitive and maybe do a lot of learning around this. However, in the first redesign the resistors wouldn’t have it, they were committed to the history and tradition and leaving the mascot alone. In my mind, all I could think of was that this was threatening their white power. I ended up making the decision to get rid of the mascot completely. We are now the Bobcats. I share that story with you because I’m not sure I could do that today.

President Rogers' comments are a reminder that the political climate has made making inroads on critical equity more challenging; however, as he shares, it is more important than ever for college presidents to be willing to take risks and make difficult decisions even if it makes them
vulnerable to public opinion or being terminated. Leaders must engage in ‘dangerous work’ as Rogers puts it, for there to be progress on closing equity gaps and elevating student success for Latinx and students of color.

President Ito from Lakeshore College has been in her role for seven years and has also observed how the political climate has changed the role of college presidents, shifting attention from external activities like fundraising and community partnerships to mediating the tensions internally. She acknowledged:

The college campus is wrought with various viewpoints, and it is now up to the presidents to have a backbone and speak up knowing they are not going to please everybody. Presidents need to have a clear vision of what their goal is, a ‘North Star’ and that when one has a clear North Star they are not as concerned about pleasing everyone with their decision making.

Uniquely, President Ito confirms her understanding of how current presidents must navigate social disparities, “And so you have to navigate your way through fraught political positions in your community, and you have to take a stand.” Presidents who have a clear commitment to racial justice driving their leadership style now comment and address social problems directly rather than as in the past where they could use more generic, politically safe approaches.

However, President Ito challenges the historically reserved approach, acknowledging the skills of a successful president, “And I think the skills that presidents now have are not just conflict resolution, rather the skills of peace building.” The current social climate for presidents requires a sophisticated ability to bridge vastly different agendas while staying true to a racial justice call to action both in words and action. President Ito succinctly shared:

The peace building skills are unlike anything we have needed in the past. We've [presidents] always used to navigate, mediate, provide conflict resolution. But this is building bridges where there's literally hate and distrust between people. I think the job has become something other than what it traditionally was to be a campus president in the past.
Like the indication by President Hernandez and President Rogers that the role of the president has shifted over the last decade, President Ito affirms that presidents need to have a highly sophisticated capacity to bring people together, despite the hostility of a polarized climate. Presidents must be willing to engage in these tough conversations if they are going to challenge racial inequities to pursue the community college agenda of reducing barriers and increasing student success for Latinx students. President Ito is passionate that presidents need a different set of skills from as she calls it, the “traditional” presidency where in the past, presidents could get by with broad experiences in instructional roles, student services, administrative budget experience, and strong verbal communication. Presidents may have had some limited experiences and exposure, although not wholly responsible for facilities planning, police, and emergency preparedness, until they became presidents. President Ito said:

I think all of that was going fine until 2015. For us [presidents], it hit the fan because you had to be a traditional president and then you had to deal with all these societal issues that emerged from the race tensions, the political divides, the religious divides. This all seemed to come to a head when Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump were running against each other for President [of the United States]. All of a sudden, you could say anything, truth was relative, you now had to be on the spear’s tip end of all of these social things. And no matter what position you take, people are going to be upset. You have to navigate your way through fraught political positions in your community, and you have to take a stand. And we took a stand and put in writing things that affected our community and our students and our employees, we would try to draw a line… But the moment you put something down, you know, you're getting a bunch of hate mail back. And so that, to me, was an entirely different territory. I find myself trying to build bridges between people who are very, very divided along socio economic lines, political lines, religious lines, whatever it is... There's so much more to it now. And I think people [presidents] need to keep their eyes wide open if they are going survive it.

Over the last decade, the presidency and demands have changed. The hostility in the national political climate is being experienced on college campuses, demanding presidents to play a more active and intrusive role in helping to keep their campus moving in the right direction.
While many mentions of race and racial justice came up throughout the interviews, they were primarily from a vantage point of individuals who have previously experienced racial inequities in their personal lives, which propelled their leadership agenda. Alternatively, white CCCPs commented on the discomfort related to racial conversations. This section has reviewed the complexities of the current political climate and how it can spill onto college campuses, creating potentially polarized viewpoints that challenge the equity agenda of HSIs. Community colleges are diverse and access-oriented institutions that serve the public good. However, the political agendas they are held to can make presidents hesitant to fully engage in race-conscious rhetoric, which is often perceived as polarizing. Therefore, I argue that being brave and explicit in race-conscious leadership, which requires constant self-reflection, can exemplify a college that is truly serving Latinx students.

**White Privilege and the DEI Paradox: Leading Beyond Neutrality**

Historically, community college leadership roles have been fulfilled by predominantly white men, despite the student population becoming increasingly diverse. The demographic shift demands leadership to consider diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives towards student outcomes. Recognizing that college campuses are diverse, leadership has consistently maintained a white majority of individuals serving in higher administrative positions (Bishel & McChesney, 2017). The imbalance of white leadership representing increasingly diverse student populations emphasizes the hierarchically embedded power relations that can maintain discriminatory practices on college campuses, which need revamping. About half of the sample population in this study identified as white, which reflects the overall imbalance of white leaders serving in presidential roles. This research provides further support to claims that having diverse representation and leadership on college campuses can increase Latinx students’ sense of
belonging and academic achievement (Maestas et al., 2007). Despite recognizing their power, authority, and privilege as white presidents, the CCCPs in this study either talked about their whiteness as a liability to building trusting relationships in DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) work or they did not discuss their privilege regarding integrating their social capital into being an ally or DEI advocate to decolonialize their institution. Despite all the areas of influence, authority, and decision making, white presidents explicitly noted that leading DEI work on their campus was the most challenging part of their job. DEI work is the most important work that CCs are focused on now, but when they claim that it is the most challenging work, it raises questions of how CCCPs plan to meet those demands. If CCCPs can be self-reflective and have more humility to recognize the needs of their campus, then they can be more conscious about incorporating professional development, self-education, and intentional collaboration with individuals who can support achieving equity goals.

Racial consciousness is a current issue across university campuses as part of a discussion to rectify historical discrimination and challenge systems that continue to disadvantage people of color. Within the scope of higher education, people of color have been discriminated against in myriad ways such as placement in remedial courses even when they hold the skills to complete college-level courses, unequal access to resources, and support such as advising and tutoring services, experiencing microaggressions in hostile learning environments, limited sense of belonging due to lack of diversity among faculty and staff, limited funding, geographic boundaries, and less successful transfer pathways (Renner & Moore, 2004; Skinner-Dorkenoo, et al., 2021; Stevens, 2018). Despite the ongoing patterns of discrimination on college campuses, there remains discussions about trying to balance the discourse of how to center Latinx student experiences with many campuses still lacking concrete efforts, policies, or actions. Some leaders
are still trying to navigate the terrain of diverse campuses while stuck in a cycle of race neutral discourse. Racial consciousness is about how leaders are going to intentionally level the playing field for students who have historically been met with challenges, such as discrimination in the form of the many tactics listed above, based on their identity. However, during the interviews, some of the white CCCPs lacked clear understandings of what racially conscious leadership looks like. Racially conscious leadership centers Latinx student experiences by creating policies and procedures that recognize the unique ways in which their identity has influenced discriminatory practices that disadvantage them. Campuses committed to racially conscious leadership do not hesitate to be clear that the college is pursuing racial equity. For example, in our interview, CCCP Phillips said:

At times it is odd to be a spokesperson for [racial issues] that is to say, look, I'm an old white guy. But my life experiences led me to value people for their intrinsic value not for their [racial] identity, and to be very intentional about that. I make that a main part of what I do with my professional career.

While this president acknowledged his white privilege and shared how society needed to change, he still had difficulty with looking at systemic challenges on his campus through a racialized lens and reflects a colorblind mentality. President Phillips shares that he prioritizes intrinsic value as more important than focusing explicitly on how people experience their education through their identity. Intrinsic value is a subjective term that is shaped by inherent biases; thus, President Phillips’ claim dismisses the important role that racial identity plays in students’ experiences. President Phillips’ flippant comment that he is “an old white guy” was phrased in such a way as to give him permission to remain at the outskirts of changing dynamics related to current discourse on race. Like other white presidents in the study, President Phillips seems a little detached from what students are experiencing. Such avoidance limits his leadership by keeping him out of touch with what barriers Hispanic and Latinx students face because of their identity,
which influences the way they must navigate the education system compared to their white counterparts. This tension is also reflected in the literature (Plaut et al., 2018). Part of the challenge of leading at a community college is how diverse these campuses are as an open access institution. However, to be an HSI that is truly serving, Hispanic students need to be visible and attended to with the full understanding of who they are as students.

During interviews, white CCCPs focused on low-risk, low-impact strategies to center Latinx students. Their approaches often relied on stereotypical and superficial methods of connection that they perceived as meaningful. For example, President Stevens of Downtown College expressed enthusiasm for celebrating culturally specific days, emphasizing symbolic gestures rather than substantive engagement. Similarly, President Friedman attempted to connect with the Latinx community by drawing on personal travel experiences and incorporating elements like food, culture, and basic Spanish into their interactions. While these efforts reflect a desire to engage with students and their experiences at an HSI, they ultimately fail to create genuine connections.

Despite their leadership positions and agency, these CCCPs miss valuable opportunities to advocate for and empower Latinx students. They could leverage their influence to enact policy changes that better serve this population, amplify student voices by increasing their visibility at board meetings, and prioritize initiatives that address the specific needs of Latinx students.

The experiences of Hispanic and Latino students are diverse and multifaceted. Connecting with them on a personal level requires more than a surface-level understanding of cultural symbols. CCCPs must develop sensitivity to students' unique lived experiences and the complexities of being Latino in the United States. This necessitates a more empathetic and introspective approach. By creating platforms for student voices through town halls, coffee
hours, and open-door policies specifically geared towards Latinx students, CCCPs can foster participatory engagement and decision-making. Inviting students to contribute their perspectives and experiences can inform strategic changes that better support their needs.

Moving beyond superficial connections built on cultural symbols, CCCPs must cultivate deeper relationships and build trust with Latinx students. Leaders need to demonstrate genuine advocacy for students' success and actively encourage their achievements. This requires face-to-face interactions, real-time discussions, and open feedback loops. Through these authentic interactions, campus leaders can understand individual students' needs and develop strategic changes that effectively support the Latinx student population recognizing that students are much more than what they eat or the language they speak at home. Ultimately, building these connections requires a genuine understanding of who Latinx students are and what their experiences entail. Only by moving beyond superficiality and embracing a human-centered approach can CCCPs build trust and create an environment where Latinx students feel truly valued and empowered.

One way that white leaders can overcome these challenges is to become more aware of their own white privilege. This means understanding the ways in which they have benefited from systemic racism and discrimination. It also means being willing to listen to the experiences of students and faculty of color and to learn from them. One important step is to center the experiences of Latinx students and equity work at the core of all activities on campus. This means ensuring that all policies, procedures, and programs are designed with the needs of Latinx students in mind. For example, leaders should provide training on implicit bias for all staff and faculty and create a system for reporting and addressing microaggressions. They should also hire more faculty and staff of color and provide support services for Latinx students.
The theme of Adaptive Competencies addresses the research questions by providing examples of how CCCPs conceptualized the need for adapting their skills, emotional resources, and tools to best serve Latinx students. The CCCPs recognize that they require a specific skillset to successfully lead and provide adequate interventions to ensure Latinx students can achieve their educational goals. The CCCPs’ responses show that they conceive of their role as adaptive to meet the demands of the current political and cultural context in which they are serving.

Leading DEI work is challenging, but it is essential if the goal is to create more equitable college campuses. White leaders play a critical role in this work by becoming more aware of their own white privilege and by being more intentional about creating an equitable campus environment.

**Theme 3: Style: Engaging and Performing as a High-Level Leader**

Presidents use a variety of leadership styles to influence others and achieve their goals. Leadership style is a set of beliefs and behaviors that shapes how a leader interacts with their team. Effective presidents can adapt their leadership style to the situation and the people they are leading. There is no one-size-fits-all, best style, as the most effective style will vary depending on the context. Presidents may use a transformational leadership style to inspire and motivate others, a transactional leadership style to set clear goals and expectations, or a laissez-faire leadership style to give others a lot of freedom and autonomy (Hamstra et al., 2014). Effective presidents can adapt their leadership style to the specific needs of the moment and use their adaptive competencies, such as communication, conflict resolution, and decision-making, to do so as discussed in the previous section.

According to the CCCPs in this study, a president’s leadership style should be authentic and aligned with their beliefs and values. Authentic leaders are more likely to be seen as trustworthy and successful in influencing others. Ultimately, the president’s leadership style
must be nuanced enough to bring people together and create a positive and productive work environment, even during tumultuous and divisive social political times. By using an effective leadership style and developing adaptive competencies, presidents can help move their institutions towards a more inclusive and equity-minded environment to best serve students and help them succeed. The subthemes that emerged under Leadership Style are listed in Figure 11, on the following page.

**Figure 11**

*Stylistic Qualities Identified from Interviews with CCCPs*

![Stylistic Qualities Diagram](image)

* Denotes that the theme also falls within the racial consciousness category.

**Note.** This figure depicts the various codes identified in the interviews that reflect CCCPs’ style.

The data resulted in the development of a series of codes that had some overlapping and intersecting themes:

**Collaborative/Participatory/Empowering:** Involvement of team members in decision-making emphasizing teamwork and collaboration. Giving team members the authority and responsibility to make decisions and act.

**Future Focused/Visionary/Proactive/Change Agent/Hopeful/Optimistic:** Positive outlook with a clear vision to plan and prepare for future challenges and opportunities, and anticipate emerging trends focused on driving and implementing change within an organization; able to develop strategies to help the college adapt and thrive in the changing context and motivate and inspire others to follow them to achieve that vision by thinking strategically, seeing the big picture, and articulating it to others.

**Motivating/Passionate:** Inspires and encourages team members to achieve their full potential by showing passion and a clear vision for the future by generating excitement and enthusiasm in others and builds strong relationships with their team members creating a positive work environment.
**Mentorship/Relational/Servant Leadership:** Actively seeks out and mentors others to help them develop their skills and leadership potential. Build strong relationships by getting to know team members to understand their needs and motivations. Focused on serving the needs of their followers to help their followers grow and develop, and to create an environment where they can thrive.

**Courageous:** Willingness to speak directly to an issue, take risks, stand up for what is right, and make tough decisions, even when they are unpopular. Not afraid to challenge the status quo or to speak out against injustice.

**Non-committal:** Avoids making clear decisions or commitments. Non-committal leaders may be hesitant to take risks, or they may be afraid of making the wrong decision. They may also be trying to keep all their options open or feel paralyzed with fear of not making everyone satisfied with their decisions.

**Peace Building/Politically Correct/Anti-racist:** Peace building leadership is a style of leadership that is focused on promoting peace and preventing conflict. Peace building leaders are typically visionary and have a clear vision for a more peaceful and just world. They are also able to inspire and motivate others to work towards this vision. Politically correct leadership is a style of leadership that focuses on avoiding language or behavior that could be offensive or discriminatory. Politically correct leaders are mindful of the impact of their words and actions, and they strive to create a more inclusive and respectful work environment. An anti-racist leadership style is committed to dismantling racism and creating a more equitable and just society. Aware of their own biases and prejudices, anti-racist leaders work to challenge racism in all its forms. They also create a culture where everyone feels safe and respected, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

**Communicative/Flexible:** Communicative leaders can communicate their vision and goals clearly to their team members. They are also able to listen to their team members and to build relationships with them. clear and concise in their communication. They listen actively and to understand the perspectives of others, provide feedback and support, build trust and relationships with others, are open to feedback and are willing to change their approach. They can adapt to change and to use different leadership approaches depending on the situation. They recognize when their current approach is not working and how to make adjustments as needed.

Although the above is not an exhaustive list of the functions and categories of codes used to analyze the data, it provides a basis for the use of coding as part of the research methodology that allowed for deeper engagement with the transcripts. Drawing on the MDLM framework, the data was analyzed by using the multiple dimensions to identify the intersecting characteristics and leadership styles of CCCPs. This allowed me to refine the MDLM framework for this study by adding the dimension of leadership approach, which assesses whether leaders use a generative or
directive leadership style. Generative leadership is inclusive of styles that are relational, collaborative, or empowering approaches that encourage team members to contribute their ideas and take ownership of their work. Directive leadership is a more top-down approach in which the leader provides clear instructions and expectations.

The following leadership styles can be classified along this dimension:

- Collaborative: Generative leadership style
- Negotiating: Generative leadership style
- Facilitative: Generative leadership style
- Directing: Directive leadership style
- Inspiring: Generative leadership style

It is important to note that this is just a general classification. Leaders may adjust their style depending on the context and the needs of their team. For example, a leader may use a more directive style when the team is new or facing a challenging task that requires close management and specific directions but switch to a more generative style when the team is more experienced, capable and has more autonomy to solve problems on their own. Given the complexities of leadership styles, it is important to consider how CCCPs identify their own leadership style. This is especially true considering the refined MDLM framework, which highlights the importance of leadership agility to navigate in complex ever-changing environments. Dr. Kabila identifies her style in the following quote:

I lead from a place of care. I lead from a place of compassion. I lead from a place of social justice and equity and ensuring that I recognize the incredible value of all the people that I work with. I recognize not everyone may look like me, or have the same experiences, but that everyone is here for a reason... who care about the people they work with, and who are committed to creating a more just and equitable world.

Although the quote from President Kabila demonstrates the limitation of self-reporting in qualitative studies of campus leadership such as CCCPs, it still provides a useful example for examining how CCCPs perceive authenticity and its use in leadership to ensure trust from
followers. Other education scholars have similarly identified concerns that leaders' self-reporting leads to an incomplete representation of those interviewed by not considering perspectives from other people with whom leaders engage (Bensimon, 1990; Birnbaum, 1990). Despite this limitation, the purpose of this dissertation is to provide preliminary findings regarding the perceptions and experiences of CCCPs, therefore, the example above offers some useful insights. President Kabila describes her leadership style as being derived from her ability to value the diversity of those she leads and her perception of herself as a social justice champion.

**Courageous Conversations: Leading Through Discomfort**

President Hernandez from Shoreline College, discusses how in the spotlight you must still perform the role in the way the community expects a president to show up, command the stage, and perform in the ways that people expect the president to represent the institution, which puts their authenticity at odds. Part of the skillset of the president is to know when to utilize each skill without it looking like one is inauthentic, allowing the narrative to be consistent in that the president is leading authentically.

Combining styles such as communicative, courageous, and peacebuilding can support efforts to improve campus relations. President Hernandez combines these three styles in his strategy to engage directly in complex and highly debated discussions on campus. President Hernandez, who had emphasized the purpose behind data disaggregation, also clearly addressed the tendency by some people to avoid difficult conversations:

And so, you must be willing to have these conversations. And yes, some people, it makes them uncomfortable. Some people will say, ‘Oh, what you're doing is divisive. This is America, you're entitled to your perspective.’ But I'm the president of this college, and the board has entrusted me to set forth a mission of vision, along with everyone else, but ultimately, the vision that's been established by the board, everything we're doing, is in alignment with our goals. So, this isn't like me being a rogue president.
President Hernandez's words are a reminder that we cannot avoid difficult conversations about race, equity, and inclusion. These conversations are essential to creating a more just and equitable society and are the responsibility of the college president to lean in and be courageous if colleges are going to see change in meeting their equity goals. The style with which CCCPs lead informs how they are perceived and received by the communities that they lead to mobilize constituents to achieve college goals. The quote above exemplifies a communicative style by the way that President Hernandez is committed to leaning into challenging conversations directly. While President Hernandez's words are a reminder of the importance of having difficult conversations, the next section will explore how some community college presidents are increasingly cautious in their communication with campus members in the current "cancel culture" climate.

Art of Saying Nothing: Non-Committal Leadership

In the current "cancel culture" climate, community college presidents are increasingly cautious in their communication with campus members, as they are aware that their words and actions can be interpreted and used against them. Despite the high value of authenticity and transparency discussed earlier, CCCPs feel increasingly vulnerable in the current climate and are hypervigilant about being cautious in their communication with campus members so their words cannot be used against them. This leadership style is used as a protective measure from political backlash but distances the president from the campus and may alienate and disenfranchise stakeholders. One example of this if from President Friedman from Canyon College who has been in his role for seven years. President Friedman discussed how cautious presidents need to be in their communication with campus members. When campus members vie for support and look to presidents to validate their perspectives, requests for resources, and personal agendas,
presidents find themselves in “gotcha” moments, in which their agreement with campus member concerns can be misconstrued as the president signing off on their agenda. Thus, conversations with campus constituents require presidents to lean into a neutral style to not give the impression of validation for any one agenda. President Friedman stated:

I think people hear or see what they want to see. And so just having to insulate yourself from any nonverbal communication, even that can be taken and run with… I have always considered myself to be pleasant as a student services person, being an active listener, like you [referring to the interviewer]. Christina, you [the interviewer] just agreed with me, didn't you? I saw you nodding. That's where we're at. And I'm like, oh God, and that's not me. I don't like being a sterile person, it's very uncomfortable to not be able to engage. But I have to be much more non-committal in my role. So that's how it [the presidency] has changed. Anything that I say can be misquoted, and so you must be very careful.

This leadership style is used as a protective measure from political backlash but distances the president from the campus. However, it also may alienate and disenfranchise stakeholders. Presidents are acutely aware that their words and actions can be interpreted and used against them in the current "cancel culture" climate. They need to be able to connect with people on a personal level, but they also need to be able to maintain a certain level of detachment. This can be a difficult tightrope to walk, but it is necessary for presidents who want to be effective leaders.

While a certain level of awareness is productive, CCCPs also need to be careful not to alienate or disenfranchise any group of stakeholders. The presidency is a complex and challenging role, and presidents need to be able to activate their unique leadership style to navigate the delicate balance between engagement and isolation.

The theme of style emerged through CCCP interviews and indicate that leaders must be conscious that they have a style and that their style has implications that can bring them closer or keep them separated from their campus community. Each CCCP needs to have a style that is
authentic to their own temperament and personality. However, it appears from their statements that higher relational open context leadership styles have a higher level of engagement and positive outcomes for Latinx students. Therefore, style is a key component of successful leadership at HSIs to support Latinx students. In addition to style, the next section will address the role of strategy in CCCP leadership.

Theme 4: Strategy: Anticipating and Responding to Latinx Student Needs

College presidents have a wide range of responsibilities, and they must be able to adapt their leadership strategies to meet the needs of their institution. Presidents engage different strategies to address various challenges and achieve specific goals for their colleges. Each college is a unique and complex organization requiring presidents to interpret what strategy is best within the context and needs of the moment. These strategies help presidents to communicate a campus vision and build momentum to get constituents on board. Approaches that were identified under the overarching theme strategy include: results-oriented, culture-focused, student-centered/student success, distributed leadership, diversity in hires, data-driven/disaggregated-data decisions, continuous improvement cycles, enrollment, accountability, innovation, political savviness, and disruptive/systemic changes. Presidents must be able to communicate their leadership strategies effectively to all stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, and the community. This is especially important when it comes to serving Latinx students as a Hispanic Serving Institution. Without a clear vision and strategy, it is unlikely that any progress will be made to move towards equity. As depicted in Figure 12 below, various codes were identified in the interviews that were all related to the theme of strategy, which provided the fourth of the overarching leadership themes derived from the transcript analysis.
Figure 12

Theme Strategy

Note. Figure 12 depicts the codes identified in the interviews that reflect CCCPs’ strategy.

Disruptive Leadership and System Change

Disruptive community college presidents are willing to challenge the status quo and dismantle systemic barriers that prevent Latinx students from achieving their full potential. By taking a disruptive approach, CCCPs can create more equitable, inclusive, and welcoming campuses and engage political savviness to achieve college goals so that they are better prepared to meet the needs of tomorrow's students. This forward-thinking leadership gives community colleges a competitive edge and helps them break free from antiquated processes that perpetuate achievement gaps.

An example of disruptive leadership strategy was President Calderón of Great Basin College. President Calderón had been in the role for six months when she was interviewed and follows a white male college president who had been at Great Basin college for six years. She shared her optimism about strategizing systemic changes grounded in equity-minded leadership that she can make at Great Basin College in pursuit of supporting and centering Latinx students. Many of her statements about making changes differently reflect her sensitivity to addressing current needs that were likely not considered equally by the prior CCCP at her institution. Where other presidents were discouraged, fatigued, and timid after addressing challenges for the college that arose with the pandemic and subsequent polarizing social political landscape, President
Calderón saw the opportunity to reset and disrupt the systems of the past that kept Latinx students from achieving their potential. President Calderón shared in the interview that she used the opportunity to rewrite the college mission statement to address racial equity. She noted that the revised mission statement included a line that the Board of Trustees does not like, which explicitly stated, “We dismantle systemic oppression to achieve educational justice.” President Calderón emphasized the importance of pushing back against the Board of Trustees who felt hesitant to adopt this language into the revised mission statement. She added further context to her commitment to engaging justice-oriented work as a CCCP and emphasized the importance of student voice to drive equity goals. President Calderón added that she implemented “centering student achievements, and really trying to show examples of how we do achieve educational justice through dismantling systemic oppression.” Strategizing against systemic oppression energized the president, making her hopeful and excited for the opportunity to reset and do-away with what had not been working in the past for students.

Alongside the innovative efforts taken to advance representation and equity goals noted in the interview, Dr. Calderón also talked about an interview she had with Dr. Gloria Ladson Billings. Dr. Billings is an American educator known for her work in the fields of culturally relevant pedagogy and critical race theory, challenging the notion of wanting to go back to the way things were before the pandemic. President Calderón summarizes Dr. Ladson Billings’ interview by stating:

Don't go back to normal, normal is where the problem was. Use this as a hard reset. Imagine the world and you do everything you can to fight for it. Our students need us to do that. And she [Ladson Billings] said: ‘Remember, normal is where the problem was.’ That's where racism was thriving. Now, we have to be new entities, new organizations. As Dr. Ladson Billings says, ‘We need people to understand this is the hard reset for us and that is very much needed right now.’
Dr. Calderón sees herself as an activist and is committed to disrupting the systems of the past that kept students of color, including Latinx students, from achieving their potential. She has no interest in going back to “normal” where the problem was. President Calderón highlighted how during her convocation she implemented for the first time reading a land acknowledgment and invited a previous employee to sing the Black national anthem. President Calderón has a heightened awareness to ensure students feel seen and represented and that their voices are heard, but she was one of few participants who explicitly noted the actions she was taking to fulfill the promises of her words. Additionally, President Calderón has experience with organizing and grass roots activism, so her style is derived from targeting the root of the problem, avoiding any “band-aid approach” to problem-solving. The examples from President Calderón represent an interest in finding long-term solutions. She is committed to the reform of the institution she is leading to better her students’ experiences, but also, she wishes to serve as an example of best practices for other community colleges in the system to adopt as strategies to improve their commitments to serving a diverse student body. The examples provided are authentic to President Calderón based on her lived experiences as a Latina and show ways in which CCCPs can employ various strategies to address systemic change. Making a strategy related to equity as the core of a president’s call to action appears to be central to making inroads to supporting Latinx students.

In addition to activism and change-oriented leadership, maintaining a level of political savviness is a strategy that was implored throughout the interviews. As demonstrated throughout the CCCPs’ discussions in the interviews, presidential positions are very vulnerable. President Rogers reported back from attending the CEO conference right before our interview that he learned the tenure of a California Community College president has dropped to under 2.9 years.
Thus, navigating those complicated waters is something presidents must be able to do, in which they can identify opportunities to share different facets of their life at opportune times to maintain their connection to their audience. Notably, from the time of interviews to the time of completing this dissertation, one of the CCCPs interviewed resigned as a result of college-perceived notions that there was a lack of commitment on part of the CCCP. The resignation signifies the volatility of leading a CC, and the political polarity and disparate lenses that create heightened expectations for leaders. Maintaining those positions can be challenging in the face of the current political climate or navigating disparate values and beliefs in the face of social justice, because the president is navigating the conflicting pressures from their diverse constituent groups ranging from the students they serve to the board of trustees at their institution.

President Ito from Lakeshore College shared insights about how a politicized higher education has shifted their role as a CCCP. They shared the following to explain how politics have influenced their leadership role:

And then you had to deal with all these societal issues that emerged from the race tensions, the political divides, the religious divides, and it kind of was coming together at the time when Hillary and Trump were running against each other, right? Everything was now, you could say anything, everything was, it was just all of a sudden. You now had to be on the spear tip end of all of these social things. And no matter what position you take, people are going to be upset. And so, you have to navigate your way through fraught political positions in your community, and you have to take a stand. And we took a stand and put in writing things that affected our community and our students and our employees, right, we would try to draw a line that, if that's happening over there, and it's not really a higher ed issue, then we're not going to comment on that. But the moment you put something down, you know, you're getting a bunch of hate mail back. And so that, to me, was an entirely different territory. And I think the skills that presidents now are not just focused on conflict resolution; they are peace building skills.

President Ito’s quote exemplifies how the job has required presidents to go beyond previous versions of college leadership. The current political context requires presidents to be willing to
take a stand and not be neutral on critical issues, even in the face of backlash. Rather, CCCPs must stand firm on the right side of history by speaking out about political issues and acknowledging current events as part of the campus conversation.

As shown in the examples above, disruptive community college presidents can challenge the status quo and dismantle systemic barriers that prevent Latinx students from achieving their full potential by taking a disruptive approach. CCCPs who implemented disruptive strategies appeared to have more clarity of goals related to racial equity and being a Hispanic Serving Institution while having the political savviness to keep their jobs secure.

**Hispanic Enrolling Versus Hispanic Serving**

President Hernandez states, “We've been race conscious in the way we work at really understanding what it means to be an HSI, not just enrolling, but serving students, we're unapologetic about that.” Hernandez shows a clear understanding of the vocabulary grounding a mission of education towards specific outcomes. President Hernandez highlights HSI serving as opposed to enrolling because there is a difference when providing a holistic approach that serves students’ needs and provides empowering interventions that have successful results for student success and graduation. Dr. Hernandez yields caution to leaders who do not share his race conscious approach stating: “And if you're going to be colorblind… it just doesn't happen.” This president is not fearful to call things as he sees them through a racialized lens. Dr. Hernandez’s discussion is a call to action in the current moment for leaders to be more direct and less word-sensitive, light-footed, or vague by speaking abstractly about these topics. This historical moment is calling for folks to speak more directly to what is going on, which is what Dr. Hernandez is addressing in his comments about leading through a colorblind lens. The shift towards race consciousness has been percolating based on current events such as the viral images
of the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police and the Trump administrations’ divisive discourse. Courageous leadership includes direct conversations on race to make inroads in closing achievement gaps and leading to reach successful results.

**HSI Designation and Leadership Approaches to Latinx Student Servingness**

While enrollment of Hispanic students at Hispanic Serving Institutions is over 25%, the mere presence of a Hispanic population on campus does not directly translate to Hispanic serving. Hispanic *serving* requires intentional strategies to center Latinx students’ needs to increase successful outcomes for those students. One example of CCCP’s comments regarding their positionality as a white leader at a CCCP are discussed in depth to highlight the difference between Hispanic serving and Hispanic enrolling institutions.

President Martin from Forrest College grappled with the identity of being an HSI stating:

I'm an outsider to this conversation [as a white president]… Well, I've grown up my whole life with, you know, white culture, if there is such a thing, being normative. So, for most of my life, things have been a Caucasian serving institution. The question is, what would a paradigm shift look like? I'm trying to flip the paradigm in my head. Well, replace Caucasian with Hispanic. What does that now mean? What are the assumptions that need to shift? Challenging the way things [the community college] were structured, the way we're formed as white institutions. So, how do we shift to focus on being Hispanic Serving when there are other cultures that are represented on our campus? I recognize that affinity groups also go beyond culture. It includes abilities, sexual orientation, religion, our neurodiversity. All those identities can add up to being Hispanic, those are ‘ands’ not ‘ors,’ because you can be Hispanic and gay, you can be Hispanic and neurodiverse, you could be, right? So, reconciling all those identities. And in fact, you can be Hispanic and African American. You have an image of a person in the dreamer center and yet these programs are exclusive. But we know with affinity groups, people go where they relate and where they identify. … I'm totally okay with living in and grappling with complexities of being an HSI. This is a very complex conversation. And so, where I am today, our institution is striving to honestly be a Hispanic serving institution. It's an identity question first and foremost; it's not a methodology question; it's not a funding question. And we must figure out what being an HSI looks like in our community and on our campus. And some of my efforts and they're more than just cosmetic and surface. We are creating communication, bilingually as an example. We are looking at ways, you know that we honor traditions, not only when it's Hispanic Heritage Month or Cesar Chavez [Day]. I mean, not on the token days when we're supposed to celebrate Latinx students, but how do we honor the heritage and the fabric of our operations? That's when the identity shift is stickier, if you will, instead of transient.
President Martin recognizes her positionality of an outsider status as a white woman leading an HSI. She grapples with the challenges of shifting the paradigm of her institution acknowledging its inception was a white-serving institution to a Hispanic-serving institution. President Martin's journey is a reminder that being an HSI is not just about enrollment numbers or funding. It is about creating an institution that is truly welcoming and inclusive of all students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or background. She is committed to making this shift to a serving institution by creating bilingual communication and honoring Hispanic traditions throughout the year. She recognizes the intersectionality of identities and wants to move the college in a direction where all students feel like they belong and have the opportunity to succeed. President Martin's journey is a reminder that being an HSI is not just about enrollment numbers or funding. It is about creating an institution that is truly welcoming and inclusive of all students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or background.

President Kabila goes a step further and although she shares this inclusive vision, she calls on institutions to embed support for Latinx students directly to create systemic change in the culture that is inclusive and equitable and truly serving. President Kabila, a Latina advocate for Latinx students, feels a personal connection to them because of her own experiences. She calls on institutions to embed support for Latinx students to create systemic change in the culture that is inclusive and equitable and reflects “servingness” as an HSI. She stated:

I think it's important to make sure that the work that we do to support our Latinx community really comes from the institution. It cannot be dependent on having a Latinx President. It cannot be dependent on a person. It has to really be truly something that's embedded as a value in the institution.
Servingness cannot rely on the shoulders of presidents and especially presidents of color alone. The institution must commit across all professional levels and departments to serving Latinx students if there is going to be lasting change.

Throughout the interviews, discussions about enrollment versus servingness highlighted the CCCPs’ ability to share the appropriate responses associated with debates over enrolling and serving students. Five presidents challenged the term Hispanic “serving” during their interviews, indicating that the term was limited in scope and did not truly shift the intentions of the campus to make system changes to better support students to successful outcomes. President Rogers, from Coastal College, felt that “supporting” would be clearer. He goes on to explain:

I don't even know what serving means. It sounds like enrollment, it sounds like marketing, it means by virtue of who we serve in our community, we are a Hispanic serving institution. What makes us Hispanic serving is what we are doing to better serve that community that has not been served well, in so many other ways in life. Recognizing that our students come from under resourced communities that have experienced systemic racism, which means that when a student comes to us, and they have come from that community, and they have, unfortunately, acquired the baggage that comes from being a brown or black person in this community, we have work to do to help them be as successful as the next student.

He provides specifics about actions his campus is taking to serve Latinx students, such as sharing that he connects his students to resources like their Promise Program, which provides free college and partners these students with success coaches and extending these opportunities for part-time students who had previously been left out because of full time status requirements. However, as the research shows, part-time students tend to be primarily first-generation Latinx students, as they have financial and family responsibilities and cannot attend school full time (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). President Rogers is trying to interrogate what serving means and recognizes that it has value but does not necessarily know how to build parity between Latinx students and white students. However, during the interview President Rogers did
not describe the steps or actions to achieve the goal of equity for Hispanic students and Latinx students. The silence around explicitly naming interventions speaks to the tension between enrolling and serving Hispanic students. President Rogers does not outwardly acknowledge the intent to serve Hispanic students with specialized interventions. Rather, broad programs designed to serve all students and include Latinx students are revealed as the primary modality in place to close equity gaps. Through a back door effort of using broad programs to serve all students without explicitly naming or providing interventions to a specific demographic, such efforts fall short of the nuance needed for genuine equity work.

CCCPs mentioned how “serving” is a hollow term or empty promise for many of the schools that are designated HSIs or otherwise minority serving. Instead, they emphasize the importance of graduating Latinx students. Three of the white CCCPs shared that they are actively learning Spanish as a currency to authentically connect with their Hispanic and Latino community or to show that they are trying to make a bridge to ensure their campuses feel welcoming. President Martin, a white leader from Forrest College, stated, “The students on my campus deserve to be spoken to in their native language." President Martin has only been in her role less than a year, however she is trying to build the currency she needs by learning Spanish to build more authentic relationships of trust with her students and community.

President Friedman echoed the importance of learning Spanish and implied the connection to students as an element of serving them. President Friedman stated:

I took Spanish and really, although I certainly am white and present as white, embracing Hispanic culture, the food, not to get religious, but I'm Roman Catholic, and a lot of the holidays I share as well as just really living life as a Southern Californian, and being in such a multiethnic place. You cannot help but live connected to Latino culture if you're truly exposing yourself to the richness of cultures around you. I try to bring that experience to make people feel comfortable.
Some of the efforts CCCPs shared raise questions about whether the efforts are symbolic or truly supportive of the students that they are trying to serve. For example, President Martin shared how she has an intentional strategy to broaden the audience that she can connect with as an attempt to create a pathway to communication, openness, and visibility by learning Spanish. Additionally, in our conversation, President Martin brought up culturally focused events and activities, specifically sharing that on the opening day of campus they brought a mariachi band, she said, “It's like, acknowledge your students and finding ways to connect in the context.” The quote shows that the savviness of leadership requires knowing who your constituents are and having the inroads to know how to make an impact in real time. Public displays of support for DEI goals can be highly visible, but they are not meaningful unless leaders also take action to elevate the voices of leaders of color and their students. The CCCPs often reiterated the values of transparency and authenticity to build trust. Nevertheless, these values are meaningless if the campuses cannot show actionable ways to serve Latinx students in ways that reduce equity gaps and elevate student success.

There is a pride in diversifying leadership on campus, as demonstrated by President Martin who commented on hiring a Latina VP to better serve the interests of Latinx students. The question remains if the hiring of diverse staff propels the college to confront the anti-racist work needed at the college to make a systemic difference in racial justice. Dr. Martin was not specific about how she sees the work that these diverse individuals will be doing on the campus to move the needle on equity goals. If time had been allotted in the interviews, a follow-up question would have provided additional insight: How can CCCPs empower and give agency to new hires of color so that they can not only be visible and positive representations of diversity for students, but also implement systemic change to serve Latinx students and close equity gaps?
President Martin said, "I'm incredibly intentional about who I’m bringing in and where they go, and what we're going to do." President Martin is committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment by having representation at various levels of the organization of the student demographic to create a culture where all students feel respected and valued, which is a noble pursuit.

President James, a white male from Riverfront college, is similarly committed to diversifying his campus through hiring diverse professionals to increase representation and better serve Latinx students:

I told HR, before you send a list of candidates/applicants to committee to screen, I want to know the demographic breakdown…Now, I also want to know the demographic breakdown of the committees, because the college already had in practice that I get to approve the final committee. Now they are appointed by their various constituents. I monitor that, and they've been able to provide our [hiring] pools have more diverse candidates. Last year, we hired approximately 100 new employees, 70% of them were people of color. And I'm proud of that…the community is very much dominated by a particular cadre of white people, male and female, but they are white…I mean, even now our board is all white, and of course, I'm white. Most of the faculty are white, most of the employees were white. I don't hire people, because they're a certain demographic, I look for diverse pools, and then choose the best person. I hired 70 people of color, last year; I was able to do this because those 70 people were the best candidates for the job and the hiring pools had the representation to make this possible. I wouldn't insult them to say, well, ‘I'm going to hire you, and give you a grading curve because of your demographic—’ that would be very insulting. I don't want to insult people's intelligence. And we want the best people in these jobs. But they can be and should be reflective of our student population, the students should see themselves. When they go to student services, they [people of color] should be represented there; when they look at Chancellor’s Cabinet, they [people of color] should be there when they look at our faculty, our deans, our administrators they [people of color] should be there. And it's becoming more and more diverse with the wave of new hires. It's easier to make those kinds of changes with the lower-level hiring. The faculty are a little bit more difficult because they run the show. And, but even with the faculty hires, I had thirteen New, full time tenure track faculty this last year, and I believe it was eight of them were people of color. So that was fantastic.

These comments reflect presidents’ understandings of the positive impact of having a diverse staff in all positions on their campus to increase student success (Vega et al., 2010). These
presidents recognize their role to change the majority white population on their campus when there are vacancies by being intentional in hiring and promoting staff who reflect the diversity of the students through their positionality.

President Gonzalez from Alta College antagonized the term “serving” as being a Hispanic Serving Institution. As a Latino, he recognized the value of the designation and resources but found it not to have utility unless it was met with students successfully graduating from his institution. He shared:

The fact that we have a lot of minority students that come to campus does not mean anything except a change in demographics in our community. The fact that they stay is because we provide good services, and the fact that they graduate is because we provide good academic support. I like to focus more on the outcome base rather than the designation. If we're not graduating students, we're not doing our part.

This quote reveals that for President Gonzalez, the only metric of servingness is students graduating, servingness is interchangeable with the outcomes of students graduating.

Leadership is a complex and contextual concept which requires a multidimensional approach. In these interviews, a base level of leadership at HSIs focuses on diversity and representation in hiring, promotional materials, and branding. However, this is not enough to move towards servingness at HSIs. Leaders must also take deliberate actions to dismantle systemic barriers and policies that prevent students from succeeding. Reflecting on the presidents’ interviews raised questions because although they were explicit in discussing engagement, relationship building, and transparency, there was discussion on how to leverage their position as president to make significant changes that would have direct benefits to Hispanic students at HSIs.

Throughout the interviews with CCCPs, many discussions about serving diverse students, Latinx, and Hispanic students specifically came up. However, those discussions were often met
with generic public relations approved and whitewashed responses that did not articulate the actions being taken. The discussions around race and serving Hispanic students at HSIs often felt contradictory because of the way participants claimed to prioritize student needs without sharing the interventions designed to meet those needs. While not all CCCPs’ named actions their institution is taking to address disparities in Latinx student outcomes, there were mentions of how Latinx student needs are being addressed in a variety of ways.

**Power Dynamics and Creating a Community of Practice**

*Shared Governance*

One of the nuances of leading at a community college is the power dynamics between faculty and administration who all share a responsibility to improve student success. President Philips from Metropolitan College recognized that integrating equity work on their campus had been a weak point and described this process as a “community of practice” to remediate this area by increasing communication and effectiveness of equity work to more stakeholders beyond the classroom:

> The faculty are talking to each other within their departments, primarily, but also in other communities of practice. We're using this to implement student learning outcomes with an equity lens as well. It's been a weak point of the college… I think it's going beyond just the classroom model, to really look at an integrated model of support and resources and making the biggest difference to have faculty lead all of these… if I could pick out the one thing that was most effective, it's the faculty, talking to their faculty peers to make the difference.

In this quote, President Phillips identifies that the key to equity work comes from the faculty. He sees his role to create the space and emphasize the importance to the campus, yet the most meaningful impact will come from faculty working with their peers to move the needle in becoming a more equity focused campus. This shows his political savviness in managing power dynamics to achieve the overall campus goals of student success.
President Douglas struggled with directed questions of how to uplift the most marginalized students on her campus trying to reconcile how to serve all students. She wants to implement targeted strategies. However, she remains cautious because she does not want to swing too far to leave white students out. She stated:

You got to be really intentional, to makes sure that you have marketing materials and that you appeal to and resonate with the different populations. And just like we're looking at our marginalized groups, you know, if we see your traditional colonial white student not succeeding too, we're asking the same questions. We'll say wait, did I? Have I done something now, on that, you know, in that arena that needs to be addressed? I know all the colleges have equity plans, we're not, we're not seeing that or, or white students are still succeeding a little bit higher at higher rates than our marginalized traditional students of color. But then we're narrowing the gap. And we're just being intentional about it, but it'll be something we'll constantly be monitoring to make sure that because it's not uncommon in human nature to swing the pendulum too far one way. And being in medicine with my early career as a nurse, we are, we're always looking for what's called homeostasis where you've got that balance. And so, we got to find that right balance where we can raise all. And I think it's important, especially as you're having the conversations with people who aren't. Don't have this often people think for the marginalized group to succeed that the other group, we're not trying to help them succeed. No, we're trying to raise all populations. And we know that by putting these different support systems in place that we can, and we will do that.

CCCPs discuss the importance of building relationships with students, faculty, and staff. The above quote from President Douglas, a white woman at Mountain College, shows how she discussed the importance of being intentional about marketing materials and other outreach efforts to reach all students, including marginalized groups. She also acknowledges that white students are still succeeding at higher rates than marginalized students and commits to addressing this gap. However, the response can also be seen as being generic to support all students and not addressing the most marginalized students. First, Dr. Douglas focuses on the need to "raise all populations," which can be interpreted as assessing what is good and supportive of one group of students as good for all students yet fails to address the needs of specific populations. Second, Dr. Douglas talks about the need to "narrow the gap" between the success
rates of white students and marginalized students, but she does not clarify how this will be accomplished even after pressing the question when a follow up was asked. Ambiguity can allow colleges and universities to be more fluid and pursue competing goals without risking conflict among divergent constituent groups (Birnbaum, 1988; Cohen & March, 1986; Contreras et al., 2008).

To make progress in closing equity gaps, leaders at HSIs must specify interventions and support resources for the most marginalized students and transparently track progress to adjust strategies as needed. These interventions and support resources could include integrating culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy into coursework; mentoring and support programs providing guidance and support from faculty, staff, and peers; increased financial assistance and education for students and families around financial aid, and intrusive academic advising with early alerts to help marginalized students navigate the college system and create a plan to succeed. CCCPs who can identify specific interventions and support resources their college is implementing for Latinx students and students of color can track their progress transparently in closing equity gaps for disproportionately impacted students are more likely to see student success of these populations increase. In addition to the value of fostering a welcoming and supportive campus culture as President Douglas identified as a benefit to student success the next section will focus on campus engagement and culture and how this impacts Latinx students and students of color.

**Culture-Focused Campus Leaders**

Effective leaders build personal connections with their followers to create a more supportive and productive work environment, which can translate into a more inclusive and welcoming campus culture. President Friedman, from Canyon College, is an example of a leader
who is focused on campus culture. He states that he wants to create a "special place to learn and work where people feel welcome and supported." President Friedman talked about campus engagement, with wanting to meet as many students as possible by visiting classes and being visible and accessible on campus to students. He does this by engaging with students, staff, and faculty on a personal level, listening to their feedback, and creating a culture of trust and respect. President Friedman went on to say he wanted to ask them questions so students could "reflect on who they are" and would allow him to "understand why they're feeling the way they are." This was a high value for him as he strives to create a "culture of listening" on his campus. President Friedman is highly relational and recognizes the value of making personal connections with students, staff, and faculty. This involves taking the time to learn about their interests, goals, and challenges. He builds strong relationships by being a good listener paying attention to what students, staff, and faculty have to say, and by remaining open to their feedback. He hopes that through being a good listener and building relationships he can create a culture of trust and respect on his campus fostering an environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions.

Although President Friedman illustrates some of the benefits of building personal connections, the question remains: How does building relationships translate into policy and action by campus leadership? To truly be a serving HSI, a president needs to rethink their leadership and governance in serving Latinx students. This means listening to the needs of students, staff, and faculty, and using that information to develop policies and programs that can elevate the experiences of Latinx students and all students of color to have a positive benefit on student outcomes. As Dr. Gina Ann Garcia (2023) wrote in *Transforming Hispanic Serving Institutions for Racial Equity and Justice*: 
Governance and Leadership bring each of the organizational dimensions of a transformed HSI together, driving the mission, identity and purpose and guiding the institutions’ efforts in centering minoritized students and voices in the curriculum, decision making and policy development...Transformed HSI’s must rethink traditional and normative approaches to shared governance while disrupting the whiteness and coloniality of power embedded within the structures, decisions, and policies of the institution. (p. 144)

To truly be a serving HSI, presidents must build relationships and center the voices of Latinx students to inform policies and programs that meet their needs, provide support, and build pathways for student success.

With an idealized perception of diversity work in mind, the CCCPs interviewed still did not clearly communicate what steps to take to achieve their equity goals on their campus. Dr. Emerson shared how they are grappling with the transition from being an ally to being an advocate- moving from passive engagement towards active disruption to support DEI efforts. By being intentional about how they communicate their approach to the work, President Emerson continued by sharing the challenges associated with leading from a place of white male privilege but showed some humility emphasizing that he is cautious and intentional on the language he chooses to use, “I no longer say I understand. I say, I respect; I want to help. I'm in a position of authority and that I can help. But I will never say that I get where you're coming from because I don't.” This quote reveals that this president has done some reflection on their privilege and wants to disrupt his human tendency to say, “I understand.” President Emerson evokes the need to move beyond assuming what it is like to walk in someone’s shoes to having empathy by listening intently and finding ways to ensure individuals feel heard and valued. This shows the president’s personal evolution becoming more sensitive and more in tune with the needs of those who are facing social and racial barriers. Earlier in this chapter, President Hernandez was quoted discussing race-based leadership, which showed the focus on inclusion while centering Latinx students. Race-based leadership is about centering Latinx students and their experiences in all
aspects of the institution. It is about listening to their voices and using that information to guide policy and decision-making. President Emerson is a good example of how CCCPs move towards a race-based leadership paradigm by grappling with the transition from being allies to being advocates. By being intentional about how he communicated his approach to the work, President Emerson demonstrated his commitment to listening and learning from Latinx students.

His statement that he will never say "I understand" because he doesn't is a powerful acknowledgement of his privilege and a commitment to respecting the experiences of others. There is a spectrum of leaders, including some who were very generic or politically correct, using popular catchphrases to assert what is important right now related to equity and race. On the other end of the spectrum, presidents presented themselves as unapologetic in their use of race to activate programs, release resources, and change past policies. Through their interviews, they expressed pride in leading at an HSI and are thoughtful about what it means to serve through action to support Latinx students.

Some white CCCPs are more hesitant to fully commit to diversity work as they feel that their efforts may be perceived as performative. This narrative pre-empts their belief on why they may not be able to achieve DEI goals. This discourse reveals a disconnect between the importance of authenticity in leadership and the praxis related to serving students from underrepresented demographics. There is a tension that HSI leaders face in trying to balance the altruistic desire to activate change with the belief that their whiteness creates distrust from the constituency they are serving. This tension creates barriers to making meaningful changes and underline a leader’s willingness or unwillingness to courageously engage in DEI topics despite their white identity. HSIs need leaders who are actively engaged and willing to address and change processes and systems to benefit Latinx students at their institution, no matter what their
racial identity may be. President Emerson also noted that since he is in a position of authority, his belief is that he can utilize his privilege to advocate and model change to help make a difference in supporting Latinx students. However, he also acknowledged that he struggles with being perceived as authentic in his efforts because of his whiteness. Dr. Emerson stated:

And I struggle with it because people aren't fully trusting, or they think I'm being disingenuous, or that I'm pandering, or that I'm just doing it because I have to…. So, that's the struggle- trying to be authentic in a time where people automatically assume that I can't or choose not to be authentic.

Following authentic leaders who are aligned with race consciousness is crucial for creating a “serving” campus. Leaders must completely buy in and confront the work needed to dismantle systemic racism. Based on the interviews, it appears that there is still hesitancy among some CCCPs to fully lean into racially conscious work to elevate students within the paradigm of serving the Latinx student population.

All presidents in this study displayed a sense of pride that their institutions are diverse and can be labeled as an HSI. This pride, at times, appeared illusive– merely reflecting demographic enrollment diversity– and for some presidents it was not broken down by meaningful outcomes and true visibility for the minority student populations they serve. All but one white president (Stevens) acknowledged their white privilege and how that had played out in their lives, especially in the context of recognizing minoritized groups who do not have these same social privileges. Nevertheless, it was difficult for the white presidents to define what they are doing to shift their campus to create more intentional structures, policies, or procedures that would help elevate their campus’s culture of servingness and improve experiences of Latinx students to achieve success.

The white CCCPs interviewed leaned towards a philosophy of the community college mission that did not necessarily account for the HSI designation as promoting new or different
leadership responsibilities or college interventions. There appears to be a recognition and pride associated with the HSI designation, yet it is presented as symbolic or tokenized with motivation grounded in increasing campus funding through accessing HSI grants. Rather than integrating or centering the HSI mission as a core part of the college culture, presidents, such as President Oliver suggested little change related to the HSI designation:

To me, HSI is a badge or a membership, if you will, that entitles an institution to certain rights and privileges. But if we weren't that, and I still had a 52% Hispanic and Latinx population, I don't think I'd be doing [anything] that much different. Yeah, I do things differently with a grant. But if I was watching schools with best practices close achievement gaps and do things that are amazing, we would want to be doing the exact same thing. So, yes because we have that designation, that's something to be proud of. It's something that gives us benefit. But to me, it does not alleviate our responsibility if we didn't have it [HSI designation] for our institution.

The way President Oliver discusses the HSI designation shows that he sees the HSI designation as symbolic to gain access to certain benefits and funding. However, because the institution has an HSI designation does not change the mission whether they are distinguished with the HSI designation or not. It is the college’s responsibility to support and serve Latinx students with or without the designation. Therefore, the intent of receiving grants related to being an HSI for these leaders may have limited impact on disrupting norms that do not effectively serve students. Continuing to repeat past practices that are not that effective, the students at HSIs are impacted by a laissez faire approach from leaders who have a sense that all they need to do is DEI work anyways. There has not been work done to meaningfully determine how to integrate the HSI identity. While some presidents seemed to feel that it was redundant to focus on the HSI designation while already committed to other DEI efforts, other presidents from the sample took a differing approach to the foundational commitment to “serving” leadership and practices that center identity-based practices for leading their diverse campuses. The formal HSI designation is not just a badge or membership, but rather a call to action to “serve.” HSIs have a responsibility
to use their resources and designation to make a difference in the lives of their Hispanic and Latinx students.

Although the white presidents experienced tension and challenges to fully embracing what it means to serve Latinx students, the leaders of color interviewed for this study represented a different relationship to serving. The CCCPs of color from the sample were committed to anti-racist ideologies and action and showed examples of fully embracing and leaning in to confronting systems to make a meaningful difference on their campuses by challenging the status quo. In interviews with white presidents, there was rhetoric that all students, regardless of their background, should have the opportunity to succeed. These presidents recognized that their campuses need to be intentional about creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students.

**Performing Equity on an HSI Campus**

The presidents who participated in this study demonstrated their political savvy by frequently using the terms "diversity," "equity," and "justice" in their comments in leading their campuses. Their jargon was almost formulaic across the board, targeting the most common buzzwords that are currently at the heart of discussions in academia. Despite the CCCP’s awareness of buzzwords and critical topics related to contemporary leadership, such references were not always evidently grounded in concrete examples of how they enact justice on their campuses. Although the interview questions provided the CCCPs with opportunities to directly comment on how the demographic of students they serve informs their leadership approach and agenda, the CCCPs in this study did not explicitly name HSIs or serving Latinx students in response to such questions, rather they offered vague reference to DEI language. This is also a finding in the literature where keywords emerged such as “diversity/diverse,”
“culture/multicultural,” and “access,” leaving the HSI identity and efforts to support Latinx students invisible (Contreras et al., 2008; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). The result was a lack of depth on part of the CCCPs in describing the function of those concepts in their practice and explicitly stating how they are closing equity gaps for Latinx students at their respective HSIs.

The presidents interviewed in this study showcased their unique approach to leading in their various campus cultures such as maintaining a physical presence amongst students, while others shared that they were more present behind the scenes putting their efforts in front of the board, and others still were quite hierarchical and left daily operations to their vice presidents so that they could put more energy into navigating community visibility and fundraising. This section provides examples from the interviews in which presidents’ silence around naming HSI designation or their efforts to support Latinx students represents the resulting invisibility of Latinx servingness and identity as central to their mission.

The rationale provided by CCCPs who acknowledged their awareness of the importance of students’ identities were glaring in discussions, such as with President Rogers, who coded efforts to support disproportionately impacted (DI) students as hidden. President Rogers continued to avoid explicitly naming DI students, justifying that he does not make direct mention of demographics because he does not want to further stigmatize Latinx students. President Rogers was fearful of tracking “those” students as requiring more support:

We don't want any of those students to be stigmatized or to be identified as, ‘Oh, I'm part of the Brown student program.’ Like, that's not part of it. But we can make all those efforts happen behind stage to assure ourselves in good conscience so that we sleep at night, that this is not a marketing tool for us. Hispanic Serving means we are doing something to lower those equity gaps to increase the access for Hispanic students and to increase their completion at the end of the day. And we identify that data as part of our grant work.
This is interesting, as the data from these efforts appears to support the grant and closes equity gaps despite that it is not marketed specifically to Latinx students. President Rogers shows intent to serve Hispanic students, but not in a visible manner that shows such commitments publicly as part of the institutional brand. The hidden “behind stage” approach to “serving” Hispanic students avoids a race conscious leadership that centers Latinx students at an HSI. The messaging from President Rogers is contradictory because he wants both things to be true at the same time. He wants to serve Latinx students to close equity gaps, but he wishes to do so through providing services to all students that do not address the nuanced needs of any one population.

In general, the responses from presidents interviewed in this study seem to lack depth and specificity about how they are actively engaged in improving equity for Latinx students, revealing that their leadership roles are removed from the work being done on their campus to operationalize diversity, equity, and inclusion. Further, across the interviews there was no discussion about the direct impact of the presidents’ work on student outcomes. My observations corroborate findings from Bensimon (1990), in which it was reported:

> Perceptual congruence between presidents and their campus leaders appears to be mediated by the bureaucratic frame. The findings in this article suggest that characteristics associated with a bureaucratic orientation may be so dominant that whenever they are a part of a president's self-description, collegial or symbolic qualities may be imperceptible to campus observers. (p. 78)

Presidents are motivated by external dynamics such as the Board of Trustees, rather than looking at the inner workings of the campus. There is a lot of responsibility resting on the presidents’ shoulders, but it is up to the entire campus operationally to achieve the many demands often attributed to the president of the campus. President Friedman exemplified this and stated:

> I was discussing mission creep and all that we're expected to do on my campus. And starting to have to say we I don't know if we can do that, in addition to everything else. So, the goals have to be comprehended within the sphere of our influence. We have to ask how does this benefit our institution or students and us as a whole.
Since so much is resting on the presidents’ leadership, they are quite vulnerable because they are also held accountable to the expectations attached to their role. Within the interviews, presidents reported how they experience competing demands to maintain campus operations as a CEO in managing their boards and public image while simultaneously moving their campus towards defining how to be a truly Hispanic Serving Institution focused on DEI efforts.

The presidents in this study use the vernacular of equity that is popular in this current educational context to show their support of serving all students in hopes of closing equity gaps (Santos et al., 2020; Scheurich et al., 2017). During the interviews, presidents used the word equity often, paired with language that was broad and generic. CCCPs used the word equity as a synonym to open access as an altruistic value to ensure all students have an opportunity to pursue their career and educational goals through attending their institution. During the interview with President James, he emphasized how he had been involved in equity work for 20 years and specified that he published on the topic. After sharing his experience studying and publishing equity-related scholarship, he shared:

I say, I am a first-generation equity avenger. I mean, I am that I’ve been doing the work a long time. Even now I sit on the CEO, diversity, equity, inclusion task force for the California Community Colleges.

Throughout conversations with CCCPs, mention of equity arose in reference to equity work without mentioning the direct barriers students face or the actions that the leaders are taking to dismantle such challenges. As shown in the quote from President James above, he claims a role as an “avenger” as a mark of distinction that he is an advocate for equity, but his backing to this claim is sitting on a committee. The definition these presidents used for equity misses a more sophisticated understanding of the needs of disproportionately impacted students and the resources and interventions needed to achieve more parity in outcomes and opportunities,
specifically for Latinx students. Literature suggests that the absence of symbols signifying the Latinization of an institution's identity may reflect internalized racism (Contreras et al., 2008). Despite this, presidents failed to provide concrete examples of interventions implemented to provide instructional interventions, wrap-around student services, or funding to support Latinx students. Based on the examples, CCCPs were hesitant to embrace the Hispanic-serving identity for fear of alienating students from other racial or ethnic groups or over-aligning with Latinx students. The lack of discussion around interventions appears to maintain their comfort using an access lens and not a racially conscious framework towards disrupting systems of oppression embedded in the campus structure (Cole & Harper, 2017). CCCPs are constantly trying to build as much consensus and support as possible without alienating any group, so they use broad language to appease as many stakeholders as possible. In doing so, CCCPs are not centering Latinx students or their HSI college identity, thus diluting efforts related to equity to make them more widely acceptable to the masses.

Although community college presidents are using familiar equity language, some, especially white presidents shied away from explicitly using anti-racist vocabulary, as it may be too polarizing. Actions towards equity and justice need to be more than words of the president, otherwise it is just an illusion and does not move the needle on equity. On the other hand, as shared previously President Hernandez challenged this generic approach by stating:

Our student demographic is at the core of my leadership approach and agenda. I'm unapologetically race conscious. And that's different than just being equity minded or equity driven… being a race conscious leader, I think looks different than other leaders, you know, and being really conscious is more than just disaggregating your data and looking at your data through the lens of race ethnicity, but it's really looking at your data through the lens of race and ethnicity and then asking, you know, are there barriers specific to different racial groups that we have either upheld or reinforced? That we need to be doing something differently, or about.
However, to be a transforming, truly serving HSI, a race-conscious leadership approach is needed to make a meaningful difference in closing equity gaps.

Many of the presidents expressed an understanding of how their institution needs to work to address the systemic racism that is embedded into policies, procedures, and campus culture. One of the ways presidents sought to do this was to ensure that all students have access to a quality education, which was topical and did not speak to any specifics to dismantle racism on their campus. Presidents discussed a futuristic desire to make their campuses more welcoming and equitable by facilitating ongoing conversations. Within the interviews, some CCCPs shared initiatives implemented to improve student success, including race-based student support cohort programs, student basic-needs resources, and flexible scheduling. However, some of the initiatives are still in an inquiry phase of where the areas of concern are or how they are not meeting students’ needs, and furthermore, there remains an inability to validate current efforts put in place to change policy and practices to better serve students as an HSI. Overall, the presidents expressed the challenge of trying to move towards a future dreaming institution while operating in a white hegemonic system while attempting to change a system that is slow to change in general. As stated by Garcia (2023), future dreaming is an institution that takes “intentional action to disrupt a racialized and discriminatory culture and create a humanizing and validating environment” (p. 53). To authentically become a serving-Hispanic institution, colleges must dismantle discriminatory cultures, systems, and policies.

The CCCP interviews led to the emergence of the fourth theme, categorized as strategy. Different from identity, adaptive competencies, and style, are systemic efforts that CCCPs prioritize in their leadership profile, which can be best categorized as strategies. CCCPs can mobilize their campus and create a culture related to the strategies they are emphasizing and...
framing. CCCPs envision and then guide the campus towards a shared mission to achieve goals related to student outcomes, which encompasses the motivations of serving Latinx student success. The data from interviews with CCCPs indicate that strategy is a critical part of how they guide the campus to mobilize efforts to support Latinx students.

Although this dissertation focuses on HSI campuses, more research is needed to determine if similar quandaries exist for other MSI campuses and other colleges in general. The findings of this study prompt the question: Are these HSI themes unique to HSIs or common among all presidents of higher education institutions? Student success was a discussion present in all the interviews with presidents described as the pursuit to elevate outcomes for their students, regardless of their race or ethnicity. Presidents also talk about the need to recognize where students are struggling and make sure they have the programs to support them so that they can succeed. As demonstrated in the examples above, CCCPs elevated the role of community colleges as playing a pivotal role in providing access to education and were energized in ensuring that all students can achieve their goals as part of their campus vision. Presidents are keenly aware of the responsibility their college must have to close student success gaps, yet many presidents were unable to communicate a clear roadmap on what efforts are needed to make a meaningful difference as a Hispanic Serving Institution. To accomplish this, many presidents identified the need for iterative discussions and the continuous evaluation of ways to improve and increase the effectiveness of their efforts to improve the student experience and create a more welcoming environment for all students. Increasing student success is at the core of the work of community colleges, yet the conversations, as cited from the data above, lack innovation related to serving Hispanic students. Despite student success being a fundamental goal, presidents miss an opportunity to fully actualize their role through their leadership, which is
further complicated by the breadth of competing demands, budgetary restrictions, and political navigation of stakeholders to manage their campus. Based on the analysis, using equity-focused language is not enough to substitute the systemic changes needed to serve Latinx students as a truly Hispanic serving institution.

Interviews with CCCPs yielded insights and data encompassing a spectrum of overarching themes, including identity, adaptive competencies, leadership style, and strategic approach. Notably, the subtheme of racial consciousness permeated all other themes. The presidents' discussions regarding the inherent tension between their positions and white privilege while attempting to dismantle systemic barriers for Hispanic and Latinx students provided valuable insights into their thought processes. These findings offer a closer examination of CCCPs' leadership styles, their key leadership priorities, and the challenges they face navigating the multifaceted political landscape. Despite the themes identified in their leadership profiles and their commitment to racial consciousness, the presidents consistently highlighted the difficulties of leading in the current political climate. Deep ideological divides and entrenched factions significantly impede consensus building and collaboration, hindering meaningful progress in addressing students' urgent needs. This complex context further underscores the critical nature of CCCP leadership in this era.

As the qualitative analysis of interview transcripts yielded increasingly comprehensive data, the dimensions of the leadership profile were further refined. This iterative process resulted in a second iteration of the theoretical framework, informed by themes that resonated with the previously established leadership dimensions. Based on these emergent themes, the MDLM was adapted to provide a more inclusive and holistic understanding of leadership profiles.
Several changes were made to provide a more precise and clarified framework. The adaptive competencies replaced the generic term competencies to better reflect skills and abilities that allow leaders to effectively adapt to new and changing situations. Four primary competencies remain, as initially identified by Eddy: (a) Minding the Bottom Line, (b) Inclusivity, (c) Framing Meaning, and (d) Systems Thinking. The four primary competencies remain part of the model as they are all part of the AACC competencies (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005). The following adjustments are depicted in the updated model, shown later in Figure 13: (1) The dimension of communication was replaced with style; (2) The dimension of leadership approach was replaced with strategy; (3a) The dimension of sense-making was replaced with identity; (3b) The poles of the identity dimension were updated to include externalized and internalized on the extremes; and (4) The racial consciousness theme was identified as a subtheme that intersected all the MDLM dimensions. The changes made the MDLM more specific and actionable for leaders. For example, the adaptive competencies provide leaders with a concrete set of skills and abilities to focus on developing. The updated identity dimension helps leaders to understand how their own identity shapes their leadership. And the identification of racial consciousness as a cross-cutting theme highlights the importance of racial equity in leadership.

The adapted MDLM transitions from a leadership schema to a comprehensive leadership profile, incorporating a spectrum of high and low context cultures at opposing poles. High context cultures rely heavily on implicit communication, utilizing nonverbal cues and shared cultural understanding built upon relationships, trust, and collective values. Conversely, low context cultures prioritize explicit communication, employing direct language and detailed explanations. This cultural context polarity offers valuable insights into the leader profile and its
influence on communication and meaning-making within Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) (Hall, 2011). The updated MDLM provides a more precise, clarified, and comprehensive framework for understanding CCCPs' leadership profiles, specifically within the HSI context.

Figure 13 presents the updated MDLM, refined through interview analysis and linguistic adjustments to align with CCCP responses and capture the essence of Eddy's (2005) original MDLM framework.

**Figure 13**

*Multidimensional Leadership Model (MDLM) Version 2*

*Note.* Figure 13 depicts the updated MDLM Theoretical Framework
The updated MDLM, shown in Figure 13, groups the dimensions into four overarching adaptive competencies: (1) Minding the bottom line, (2) inclusivity, (3) framing meaning, and (4) systems thinking. Within the dynamic three-dimensional model, the adaptive competencies intersect with three factors, which include style, strategy, and identity. The adapted MDLM provides a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of leadership profiles, in understanding CCCPs at HSIs. It allows for the exploration of how CCCPs make sense of their HSI designation through the lens of their leadership profile, and how their adaptive competencies, unique identities, style, and strategy intertwine with their level of comfort with racial consciousness moving between passivity (colorblindness) versus activism (racial consciousness). It is important to note that racial consciousness is a journey and like all dimensions on the MDLM leaders can move back and forth along the spectrum as one learns and grows through dialogue and understanding.

In the following chapter, the findings are further elaborated through conclusions and key takeaways regarding recommendations for CCCPs and higher education administration and leadership. It will include insights derived from the data about how to realize servingness when leading an HSI. Additionally, limitations of this study will be discussed as well as suggestions for future research.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

Through interviewing CCCPs, the results of this study showed indications that self-reflection and a critical self-awareness are essential to the successful leadership of CCCPs at HSIs with a mission to serve the needs of Latinx students. Uniquely, the process of participating in this study allowed for the CCCPs in the sample to engage in the type of self-reflection that can enhance a critical self-awareness as a leader. After the interview process, several participants followed-up to share that the conversations we had were thought provoking and insightful, pressing them to reflect on things about themselves and their leadership that they had not previously examined. Thus, the practice of participating in this research both uncovered the themes and results that emphasized the importance of self-reflection, and also provided space for leaders who may not have taken time to reflect otherwise.

Throughout the study, the data highlighted methods shared during interviews with CCCPs for addressing disparities for Latinx students, which included culturally relevant programming and services to provide experiences that help Latinx students feel more welcome and supported on campus. Additionally, recruiting and retaining Latinx faculty and staff was reported to allow Latinx students to see themselves represented in the college community. Furthermore, CCCPs suggested creating a supportive financial aid system with targeted in-reach and bilingual outreach to publicize avenues to Latinx students, showing them how they can afford college and how to apply. Moreover, the findings indicate that facilitating partnerships with community organizations to improve basic need support on campus to connect students to holistic support services in their communities is a productive way to address equity gaps. Most importantly, CCCPs have the opportunity to evaluate and advocate for policies and practices that are inclusive.
and reduce barriers to support Latinx student success. These methods are all important ways to address equity gaps and create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for Latinx students.

The sample for this study was comprised of 18 participants, and the data gleaned compelling and detailed insights related to answering the research questions: 1) *What does leading a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) mean for a California community college campus president?* and 2) *How does the HSI designation inform the CCCP’s leadership approach?* This study employed in-depth, semi-structured interviews with campus presidents at California Community Colleges (CCCs) serving a Hispanic student population exceeding 25%, regardless of Title V HSI grant status. Interviews were conducted with a consistent duration of approximately 60 minutes.

Significantly, the study participants represented a diverse range of CCCPs in terms of both race and gender. An equal number of white (9) and leader of color (9) presidents participated, alongside 11 male and 7 female presidents, ensuring a well-rounded sample capturing a multitude of experiences. While this cross-sectional research design yielded valuable insights, it is crucial to acknowledge that despite the diverse representation within the sample, it encompassed only 16% of all CCCPs in leadership roles as of 2023. Consequently, generalizing the findings to the entire population of CCC presidents is not possible.

Some of the interview responses were superficial. Future research would benefit from a longitudinal study where additional observation could be made to evaluate the presidents’ leadership over time. Additionally, pairing a longitudinal study with a cross analysis of responses from constituent groups that the president leads such as faculty and students would enhance the results. Including direct voices of presidents is an important first step in the research, however additional opportunities and engagement could garner a clearer sense of the complexities of
diversity and systemic changes needed to be achieved by leaders to meet the needs of underrepresented students.

This research elevates awareness and visibility of Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) by focusing on leadership practices through interviews with CCCPs. The study highlights the critical role of MSI and HSI leadership in mobilizing efforts that demonstrably enhance student success and outcomes. Furthermore, the research underscores the enduring importance of diversity work for all college leaders, regardless of MSI designation. It emphasizes the need for a deliberate focus on centering Latinx students to fully realize the "serving" aspect of being a Hispanic-Serving Institution. By amplifying the voices of CCCPs and focusing on leadership, the research offers valuable insights that can propel both MSIs and HSIs towards a future where all students have the opportunity to flourish. This research validates the critical need for CCCPs to possess a commitment to diversity and inclusion, not as a temporary objective, but as an essential pillar of a successful and equitable higher education system.

This study's contribution goes beyond mere awareness. It provides actionable insights into effective leadership practices within MSIs and HSIs, enabling leaders to better serve their diverse student populations. Additionally, the research illuminates the lasting impact of diversity work, urging all campus leaders to actively engage in efforts that promote equity and inclusion.

This chapter will address current events impacting CCCPs at the time of this research study. It will then revisit the research problems and questions that grounded the study to situate the final conclusions. Additionally, it will provide key takeaways that emerged from this research, including how the theoretical framework informed the data analysis. Finally, this
chapter will outline limitations to the study, avenues for future research, and the broader implications of this dissertation research.

**Historical Implications: CCCP Leadership in 2023**

Latinx students were highly impacted by the historical events of the last decade. The Trump administration rolled back a few Obama-era policies that were designed to promote racial equity, including the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and the Fair Sentencing Act (Ching et al., 2018). The administration also appointed several conservative judges to the federal courts, including two Supreme Court justices, who opposed policies aimed at promoting racial equity (Cohen & Yang, 2018; Nemacheck, 2021). The subsequent Biden administration has been slow to make progress on addressing issues and prioritizing legislation that supports the advancement needed to move forward with racial equity in the United States.

In this doctoral study, racial consciousness was a concept that all the CCCPs grappled with due to their situatedness amidst the national political appointments. CCCPs recognize that the open access admissions of their institution serve the most diverse students in the world and as such, these changes have a direct impact on their students. In this contentious political climate, CCCPs must work tirelessly on behalf of students to combat colonial discourse and dismantle systemic barriers to ensure that their Latinx students are being heard, respected, and supported to achieve their goals.

CCCPs were very specific in their interviews that their leadership shifted and required a new strategy after the Covid-19 pandemic, racial unrest in the country after the George Floyd murder, political chasm in the United States, and in response to Trump Administration policies on DACA and immigration to serve students at community colleges. Consequently, the responses would have had a different focus and sentiment had the interviews been conducted a decade ago. Similarly, if this study is repeated in the future based on current events and domestic
and global issues, there is likely to be a different vantage point and responses of CCCPs during that time.

**Research Problem Revisited**

As the number of Latinx students in higher education continues to grow, there is an urgent need to elevate research on Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This study examined whether leaders such as CCCPs are leveraging their leadership to advance and ensure that their minority students are "served" in accordance with their federal MSI designation and grant investment. This research centered HSIs and revealed how CCCPs fulfill their promise to "serve" Latinx students. Based on past and current HSI trends, CCCs will continue to enroll the majority of Latinx college students. This entry point to higher education provides a crucial pathway to opportunities for the fastest growing and largest population of color in the United States. It is essential that the most vulnerable, underrepresented student populations such as Latinx students are served through access and opportunities to maximize their potential for success. Thus, this study evaluated CCCPs efforts to support Latinx students on HSI funded campuses to better identify whether the designation is causing positive benefits for the Latinx students it is intended to serve.

California Community College Presidents (CCCPs) play a pivotal role in shaping the culture of their institutions. Research on the importance of culture at Hispanic-serving institutions has grown and shown a positive correlation between culture and student success. However, CCCPs have not been the focus of research at HSIs. This study began to understand who HSI presidents are, what experiences led them to lead at an HSI and uncover how CCCPs internalize their designation as an HSI in order to make strategic leadership choices. This study reveals the tension and celebration of choosing to embrace the HSI designation.
This study highlighted the unique role that HSI presidents play in supporting Hispanic students and the ways in which the HSI designation can help HSI presidents better serve their students. The HSI designation gives HSIs access to additional funding and resources, which can be used to support programs and services for Hispanic students. It also gives HSIs a platform to advocate for Hispanic students at the state and federal levels. Thus, this study revealed that HSI presidents must be aware of the challenges that Hispanic students face and create a campus environment that is supportive and welcoming. They must also provide culturally relevant programming and services that meet the needs of their students.

**Key Takeaways: Summary of Key Results and Analytical Contributions**

This dissertation contributes to scholarship on the leadership of community college presidents by providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that CCCPs face in leading HSIs. These findings can be used to inform the development of policies and programs that intentionally support CCCPs in their work to close equity gaps for Latinx students. The findings from this dissertation can be used to inform the preparation and development of CCCPs who are leading or aspiring to lead HSIs.

Based on the interviews with 18 CCCPs, this study identified several key factors that are essential for effective leadership at HSIs. The critical aspects of effective leadership at HSIs by CCCPs include identity, adaptive competencies, strategy, and style. Importantly, the data demonstrated a throughline of the importance of racial consciousness, which was addressed in relationship to the four critical aspects of effective leadership. Following, the critical findings and applicability of the results are reviewed.

*Identity.* Within the interviews, the discussion of identity centered around how personal experiences and positionality inform the approach that each CCCP takes in their role. Presidents bring the intersection of all their identities into how they lead, and the interviews were clear that
their personal identities provided motivation for the goals of their work such as serving Latinx students and providing access. Based on the patterns, it was notable that the CCCPs did not share the same approach because of their diverse histories and backgrounds that shaped their strategies to leadership. Through the data analysis, it can be determined that CCCPs benefit from a heightened awareness of their identity and integrating that into their public persona and leadership with recognition of the limits of their personal background. By reflecting on their own identities and how they compare to those of their constituents, CCCPs can garner valuable self-awareness. This introspection can encourage them to cultivate greater humility and seek out experiences that enrich their understanding of areas where they lack familiarity. Chapter Four provided a compelling example of how identity shapes leadership through the case of Dr. Calderón, a Latina president. Inspired by her family's experiences of discrimination as Hispanic immigrants, she found both personal motivation to pursue a higher education and a deep commitment to advocate for students facing similar challenges. These experiences laid the foundation for her leadership, driving her to champion core values of inclusion, visibility, and access for all students. The experiences of white presidents, like President Rogers and President Oliver, highlight the need for introspection and self-awareness regarding one's racial identity when engaging in equity work. Their cases illustrate how internalized whiteness can require deeper reflection and sensitivity to recognize and dismantle both power dynamics and the stereotypes associated with being white. These examples provide valuable lessons for all CCCPs, encouraging them to position their white identities as tools for allyship and advocacy.

By examining their own personal narratives and historical contexts, CCCPs can identify areas that may contribute to inherent bias. Recognizing the significance of identity allows them to be transparent in their leadership, authentically engaging with diverse communities. This
authenticity can pave the way for inviting individuals of various backgrounds to the table, fostering a more inclusive and representative leadership structure. Ultimately, this approach cultivates a richer campus dialogue, facilitating deeper understanding and building a stronger community for all.

Elevating underrepresented voices and experiences is central to building trust and aligning actions with racially conscious leadership strategies. By centering the identities of people who reflect the diverse backgrounds of the students their campuses serve, CCCPs can demonstrate their commitment to inclusivity and empower the voices that have been historically marginalized. This empowerment leads to increased student engagement, improved student outcomes, and ultimately, a more equitable and thriving campus community.

*Adaptive competencies.* It is clear from the interviews that CCCPs utilize adaptive competencies such as authenticity, vulnerability, listening, transparency, communication, empathy, and humility to ensure that they are effective in their leadership. They identified many competencies that they draw from to lead by building trust and encouraging those that they lead to feel passionate about following their vision. For example, in Chapter Four: President Kabila's adaptive competencies align with the literature on authentic leadership. Her comments on leading with integrity and being congruent with one’s actions and words provide evidence of these competencies. Authentic leadership is rooted in the notion of the “true self,” and it impacts follower behavior when they believe their leader has integrity. This can lead to increased work performance and engagement in pursuing organizational goals (Ladkin & Taylor, 2010; Leroy et al., 2012). She warns that if leaders fail to do this, “eventually that mask falls off,” and one’s true nature is revealed inevitably, which makes it difficult for leaders to build trust or motivate the campus to support the CCCP’s vision.
The interviews with CCCPs revealed many specific competencies that CCCPs mobilize to meet demands of a changing world. These adaptive competencies can be described as soft skills. CCCPs’ emotional intelligence engaging these competencies helps them understand their constituents and how best to motivate them to pursue equity goals and to navigate areas of conflict and disagreement related to this work. Therefore, adaptive competencies serve as tools for leaders to make effective inroads pursuing equity goals by adapting and leveraging new approaches while remaining open to learning and being flexible to pivot as needed to be successful in the college context.

**Strategy.** Throughout the interviews, presidents shared their many strategies used to navigate the complexity of their organization. The strategies shared included being results-oriented, culture focused, and student centered in order to serve Latinx students at HSIs. Strategy refers to the direct approach guiding how CCCPs are leading the campus to change. The presidents had a wide variety of strategies that they used to achieve similar goals such as learning Spanish, improving diverse faculty and administrator representation and centering student voices in front of the Board of Trustees. Presidents who were willing to talk about their disruptive approaches to create a supportive and inclusive campus for Latinx students allowed for innovative thinking for these large-scale challenges. Another component of strategy was the focus on serving versus enrolling at HSIs. Despite presidents recognizing their diverse student enrollment and concentration of Latinx students, their strategies varied regarding intentionality in centering Latinx student experiences, in contrast to strategies that serve all students. Developing a strategy can help CCCPs to work through the tensions that they face to provide adequate interventions specifically for Latinx students at HSIs.
Style. A variety of leadership styles emerged from the interviews with CCCPs. These styles were instrumental in supporting a campus climate that advanced their goals. Style is the dynamic way in which CCCPs show up and behave in leading their organization. CCCP leadership style is not a static set of rules or principles, but rather a way of leading that is constantly evolving to meet the needs of the campus and those they serve. Leadership style refers to how a leader interacts with others and builds relationships. Measuring and defining one’s leadership style can be difficult, as it is nuanced and can be context dependent and less about how CCCPs set goals and achieve specific objectives.

Based on the emergence of stylistic themes and the emphasis on presidents’ style, CCCPs need to address the current climate of their campus and must be sophisticated enough to determine which style is necessary to meet the needs of their campus. Chapter Four highlighted two conflicting styles that CCCPs leveraged. President Hernandez exemplified his communicative style in his description of confronting conversations of race directly, despite some of the campus members feeling these conversations are divisive. He recognizes that everyone can have their own opinions but feels emboldened to pursue the community college mission and equity vision established by the board, ensuring that his leadership is aligned with the campus goals. Alternatively, a different approach to President Hernandez was President Friedman’s style, who was acutely sensitive to the current climate of cancel culture and the vulnerability of his presidency. His style was more evasive, and he was careful not to say too much so that individuals could not presume that the CCCP had committed to actions that are unintended. He describes an interaction where he was confronted by an employee that suggested that President Friedman had supported an initiative, he was unaware of on campus. He reflected:

The employee challenged me and said, ‘Well, evidently you had a hallway conversation and you nodded and walked back.’ That's not approval. But I think people hear or see
what they want to see. I have to insulate myself from any nonverbal communication, so that individuals can’t take what they think I said and run with.

Regarding style, CCCPs should be more reflective and take inventory on how their style impacts the contexts in which they serve. CCCPs who understand their individualized style and the influence of their leadership might be more effective in achieving their goals. If leaders do not consider the influence of their leadership style, it can result in an asset or deficit-based approach, which might not achieve their desired effect. This is especially true in pursuing equity and closing student success gaps for Latinx students. Presidents who understand their style could bridge divisive opinions and lead their campus through more empowering energy to pursue those goals. Therefore, the more a president is aware of their style and capable of refining it appropriately, the better equipped they are to serve Latinx students.

*Racial consciousness.* Unlike the other four themes, racial consciousness was intertwined and linked to each and emerged in relationship to discussions grounded in identity, adaptive competency, style, and strategy. Racial consciousness is the awareness of, and engagement with, the ways in which race and racism shape individuals lives and institutions. It is a critical lens through which to view and address the challenges faced by Latinx students in the CCC system. Racial consciousness is essential for effective CCCP leadership, central to equity work in the CCC system, required for efforts related to student success, and pivotal for institutional transformation to meet the needs of Latinx students.

Findings related to white presidents are consistent with other research on the racial consciousness of white leaders. This research shows that white leaders are often deficit-minded in internalizing how their whiteness impacts equity work (Ladsen-Billings, 2006; Marginson et al., 2011; Scheurich, et al., 2017). This means that they may not be aware of the ways in which their own racial identity and experiences shape their perspectives and decision-making.
Racial consciousness matters for CCCPs because it is essential for them to be effective leaders and to create a just and equitable CCC system for all students. CCCPs can apply racial consciousness in their leadership by: 1) Engaging in ongoing racial learning and development. This includes learning about the history of racism in the United States, the ways in which race and racism manifest in the CCC system, and how to be an anti-racist leader; 2) Building relationships with Latinx students and listening to their experiences. This will help CCCPs to better understand the challenges faced by Hispanic and Latinx students and to develop policies and practices that address those challenges; and 3) Creating a culture of racial consciousness within their institutions. This includes communicating the importance of racial consciousness to all stakeholders, providing training on racial consciousness, and creating opportunities for dialogue and discussion about race and racism. CCCPs who engage in this discourse can help to dismantle the barriers that prevent Latinx students from succeeding.

In summary, this dissertation provides examples of CCCPs calling for a more intentional approach to serving Hispanic students. The CCCPs argue that HSIs need to go beyond simply enrolling Hispanic students and move towards a campus environment that is welcoming and supportive of Latinx students. CCCPs also reflect that HSIs need to be more proactive in advocating for policies that benefit Hispanic students. In an effort to achieve the goals outlined by CCCPs, this study identified a number of key factors that are essential for effective leadership at HSIs. The four essential themes that encompass the leadership profile of effective leadership at HSIs by CCCPs include identity, adaptive competencies, style, and strategy. Notably, racial consciousness was a subtheme that emerged across the data and was addressed in relationship to the four themes of effective leadership. The results of this study reveal how CCCPs show up and the decisions that they make as leaders at MSIs specifically serving Latinx students. Although
the results of this study are not prescriptive, the insights garnered through close analysis of the interviews with 18 CCCPs provide examples of, and guidance for, effective HSI CCCP leadership approaches.

**Leader-Focused Recommendations**

This study provides preliminary understandings of how CCCPs perceive that their leadership practices are influenced by the HSI designation. Recognizing trends in CCCPs’ leadership can help to identify how to effectively lead at HSI campuses to help more Hispanic students succeed in college. There are three major recommendations that came from this study. First, CCCPs must know who they are and how their identity factors into their leadership. They have a toolkit of experiences that they bring to their leadership and need an awareness of, and commitment to, racial consciousness to enter the HSI space. Second, CCCPs need to prioritize building trust with the campus to bring the community along in this vision of servingness. Leadership is important, but CCCPs cannot do it alone. Rather, leaders can support achieving HSI goals through collaboration across campus departments and relationship building. Finally, the third key recommendation is that CCCPs must be held accountable to the goals and outcomes of being a serving institution, using data to evaluate the results from CCCP leadership. This study provides insights on how a CCCP’s leadership approach is affected by the HSI designation and can have a significant impact on Latinx student success. The three recommendations outlined above are further elaborated in the specific actions recommended below. The following are critical elements that CCCPs must have that emerged from the results of this study:

1. **Ground leadership in personal identity:** Grounding leadership in one’s personal identity requires leaders to understand their own values, beliefs, and experiences and how they shape their leadership style. This includes being cognizant of how particular identities have afforded privileges or marginalized them and how those experiences have impacted
their life and leadership style. In addition, CCCPs can use their identity to inform their work and build relationships with others. Having a strong sense of self-awareness and understanding one’s positionality enables more authentic and genuine interactions with others. When leaders are grounded in their personal identity, they are more likely to be effective at building relationships and inspiring those they lead. They are also more likely to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for everyone. Some examples of how leaders can ground their leadership in their personal identity may include a Black leader who might talk about their experiences with racism and how that has shaped their commitment to social justice. A woman leader might talk about her experiences with sexism and how that has informed her advocacy for gender equality. A LGBTQIA+ leader might talk about their experiences with discrimination and how that has made them passionate about creating a more inclusive workplace. In sharing more vulnerable aspects of CCCPs personal stories and experiences, leaders can help others to understand and appreciate their unique perspective and leadership style. This can lead to more informed decision-making, stronger relationships, and a more inclusive and equitable campus. CCCPs cannot do this work alone and need their campus constituents, including students, faculty, and staff to be behind these efforts to help realize these goals.

2.) **Create trusting relationships:** When entering a new role as CCCP, it is important to establish trust with constituents. Leaders can do this by being authentic and sharing who they are to create connections with those they serve. Leaders can establish this by being honest and transparent in their communication, being reliable and following through on commitments, being open to feedback and willing to learn from others, being fair and just in decision-making, and being respectful of everyone regardless of their position or
background. When CCCPs create trusting relationships with their constituents, they are more likely to be successful in achieving campus goals, especially equity related goals. Trust is essential for building teamwork, collaboration, and a positive campus culture. By being authentic and sharing who they are, leaders can start to build trust with their constituents from the very beginning. Building trust and a positive campus culture requires a concerted effort from all members of the community. CCCPs can play a leading role in this process, but they need the support of their constituents to be successful.

3.) Center Latinx student experience and outcomes: CCCPs can strategically include efforts to center the HSI designation as part of the colleges’ goals to close equity gaps and make sure that Latinx students feel welcome and respected. CCCPs are responsible for determining when HSI efforts are best for the campus. This means advocating for Latinx students and creating policies and procedures that prohibit discrimination and harassment. CCCPs can ensure that candidate pools are diverse and support hiring of more faculty and staff of color. This will help to ensure that Hispanic students have role models and mentors who share their culture. CCCPs have an important say on hiring before it goes to the Board of Trustees and therefore have a responsibility to ensure that there is diverse representation for the best candidates being selected. Seeing Hispanic and Latinx representation in leadership positions is important for students because it can help them to feel seen and heard, inspire them to pursue their own leadership goals, and promote diversity and inclusion. CCCPs play a vital role in advocating for the inclusion of courses on Hispanic history and culture, and the diversification of course texts. By working with the academic senate and curriculum committee at their campuses, CCCPs
can help to ensure that Latinx students have access to learn about their own culture and heritage. This can help students develop a sense of identity and pride in their community, while also giving non-Hispanic students opportunities to learn about the history and culture of other groups. This can help students to develop empathy and understanding for people from different backgrounds. Colleges with an inclusive curriculum that reflects the diversity of the student body can help all students to feel seen and valued. It can also help students to develop the critical thinking and communication skills they need to succeed in a globalized world. CCCPs can create spaces where students can feel comfortable expressing their culture. This could include creating a Hispanic student center or providing spaces for students to pray or meditate. Finally, CCCPs must exercise fiscal responsibility with all funding decisions. Leaders must be intentional and transparent about how funding is used, to improve academic outcomes for their Hispanic students by increasing resources for student success and enhancing research capacity.

4.) **Use leadership style to leverage outcomes:** CCCPs have different ways of leading and interacting with others. Some CCCPs may be more collaborative and inclusive, while others may be more directive and decisive. CCCPs must recognize the influence of their style on potentially bringing people together or isolating or creating divisiveness based on unique needs or interests. This means that CCCPs need to be aware of how their leadership style affects others. Some leadership styles may be more effective at bringing people together, while others may be more likely to isolate or divide people. CCCPs can use their stylistic approaches to promote equity and inclusion by being mindful of the unique needs and interests of their diverse stakeholders. For example, a CCP with a collaborative style might make sure to include all stakeholders in decision-making, while
a CCCP with a more directive style might be more mindful of communicating their decisions concisely. By being aware of their own stylistic approaches and the potential impact on others, CCCPs can incorporate a process of self-reflection to better align their decisions with careful attention to the impact of their past actions. Further, recognizing the influence of their silence and putting themselves out there as advocates, CCCPs should recognize that their silence can have a negative impact on Latinx students. They should be willing to put themselves out there as advocates for these students, even if it means taking risks.

5. Prioritize HSI “servingness” in leadership: CCCPs play a vital role in ensuring that their campuses are truly serving Latinx students. Servingness in the context of HSI leadership refers to making Latinx students the focal point of campus efforts. Centering Latinx student experiences is critical, and it is not enough to merely have a Latinx student presence on campus. Serving refers to addressing the unique needs of Latinx students and providing resources that support their academic success. Serving is important as it shows their commitment to meeting the needs of Hispanic and Latinx students based on the intentions of the HSI designation. CCCPs can define servingness as a value on campus by working with faculty, staff, and students to develop a shared understanding of what it means to serve Latinx students. This could involve creating a definition of servingness, developing a set of values or principles that guide servingness work, and identifying specific ways that everyone on campus can contribute to serving Latinx students. Additionally, CCCPs can focus on becoming racially conscious. CCCPs can commit to their own ongoing racial consciousness development by participating in professional development opportunities, reading books and articles on race and racism, and engaging
in reflective practices. They can also use their platform to educate others about race and racism and to challenge systemic racism on their campuses through actions such as actively engaging in discussion around their HSI designation. CCCPs can implement a cross-functional HSI task force and from their outcomes can provide recommendations to inform the campus master plan and mission statements. CCCPs can work with other campus leaders to ensure that HSI servingness is explicitly mentioned in the campus master plan, mission statements, and other key documents. This will help to signal to the campus community that serving Latinx students is a priority.

These recommendations can help CCCPs elevate the visibility of being an HSI and provide vital leadership to ensure that their campus is truly serving Latinx students.

**Theoretical Framework Revisited**

The Multidimensional Leadership Model served as the theoretical framework grounding the data coding and analysis for this study of CCCP leadership. Axial coding paired with the MDLM helped to establish the overarching themes that comprised the major findings and results of this study. The model is not a one-size-fits-all solution because there is not a standard leadership profile that is ideal for every circumstance. Rather, the model provided a tool to help organize the various characteristics that the CCCPs in this study alluded to or expressed throughout the interviews. Evaluating a variety of dimensions on a continuum provided a more holistic evaluation of each CCCP. Different leadership characteristics are needed in different community college contexts; thus, the MDLM provided a lens for understanding how CCCPs understood and approached the unique needs of their respective institution. The dimensions of the model are constantly interacting with each other, and the model is adaptable to a variety of leadership approaches and styles. While for the purpose of this study, the MDLM was used to establish leadership profiles to organize the data and assess how different CCCPs approach their
role, in future iterations of this study, leaders could be more active in using the model to reflect on their own leadership practice and to identify areas where they can improve (Boyd & Fales 1983; Stoeckel & Davies, 2007). The model can be used as a framework for leaders to become more conscious and self-aware of the dimensions of leadership that they are leaning into, which could provide opportunities for professional growth.

The Multi-dimensional Leadership Model was a useful tool for developing this dissertation about CCCPs because it provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the strengths and limits of leadership dimensions in the HSI setting. However, there are some limits to the application of the MDLM theoretical framework. For example, while the MDLM identifies leadership profiles related to the coded themes that emerged in this study, the framework does not consider other contextual factors such as the impacts of social and political climate. Without a focus on how particular social and political climates influence leadership and vice versa, the model presents leadership as solely intrinsically driven without acknowledging some of the broader extrinsic influences that affect leaders' behavior, style, and strategy. While the model was limited in regard to extrinsic influences, this dissertation addresses the social and political contexts in which the CCCPs lead to incorporate these aspects into the analysis.

Limitations

This dissertation acknowledges the inherent limitations of qualitative research, particularly regarding the generalizability of findings. While the study's sample population of California community college presidents (CCCPs) yielded rich data and deep understanding through saturation, the results may not be directly applicable to other regions.

Although there are many potential avenues for future research that arose in the process of this dissertation, a few questions resonate with immediacy regarding how the HSI designation affects the relationships between leaders and students and how leaders prioritized closing equity
gaps for Latinx students. The interview protocol used in this dissertation asked two questions related to how CCCPs reconcile serving all students: 1) Many MSIs serve highly diverse student populations, how do you reconcile that demand to make sure all students feel supported? and 2) How do you prioritize seeking funding for these populations? The responses to these questions provided a spectrum of answers ranging from unapologetic approaches to serving Hispanic students to the careful use of access language that rationalized that their interventions were designed to support all students. While the range of responses captured some of the ways that MSI leaders approach serving their highly diverse student body, there was not enough evidence to create clear conclusions about how to best serve Latinx students within the scope of this project. Additionally, the following questions emerged from the preliminary responses to the questions about servingness and the HSI designation that future researchers are encouraged to investigate: 1) What are the long-term impacts of the HSI designation on student outcomes? 2) How does the CCCP build and maintain relationships with key stakeholders, such as faculty, staff, students, and community members? and 3) How does the HSI designation affect these relationships? While this dissertation was unable to delve deeply into these questions, it lays the groundwork for future research that can address them comprehensively. By building upon the foundation established here regarding CCCP leadership approaches at HSIs, future scholars can contribute significantly to our understanding of HSI leadership and its impact on student success and equity.

**Future Studies: Where Can CCCP Research Go From Here?**

The results of this study serve as a launch pad for future research about CCCPs campus leadership and serving at HSIs. Future iterations of this study would benefit from the inclusion of voices from other executives, administrators, faculty, classified professionals, and students to determine if each president’s self-perception and vision is materializing on the campus level.
This section discusses opportunities for future research that will enhance the preliminary findings of this study.

Although professional development emerged as a key theme during interviews with CCCPs, it was not directly examined in this study. Nevertheless, the importance of professional development for administrators, faculty, staff, and students in fostering a more equitable and inclusive learning environment for Latinx students cannot be overstated. Future research on CCCPs should delve deeper into how professional development can be strategically integrated to cultivate a thriving Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) culture. The interviews highlighted organizations such as HACU, Excelencia, and A2MEND as valuable resources for professional development. Additionally, one CCCP emphasized the critical role of professional development in equipping faculty with the skills necessary to effectively teach Latinx students and close student success gaps. Exploring the effectiveness of engaging with professional development organizations and investigating other avenues for professional growth would be valuable avenues for future research, particularly regarding its impact on faculty and campus-wide efforts to close Latinx student success gaps.

Data and funding are important for HSIs, but they were not fully addressed in this study. CCCPs make decisions about how to allocate college budgets and funds, as well as what new funding to pursue. Therefore, it is important to understand how CCCPs perceive the value of funding and how they plan to use it. For example, HSIs received HEERF funding during the pandemic. However, it is unclear how this funding was used to directly support Latinx students. CCCPs use funding to serve Latinx students in different ways, reflecting the type of serving institution they are. How leaders use funding highlights their priorities for their campus or organization. This study found that some leaders are advocates for effectively applying funds to
support Latinx student outcomes, while others are unaware of how the funding can be used. To close achievement gaps, it is important to center funding on evidence-based interventions that support Latinx students. Future research can explore practical solutions for directing spending and increasing accountability for how leaders use funds. Although funding was not fully addressed in this study, we know that there is data regarding Latinx student outcomes and funding of HSIs, which prompted the need to investigate leadership in this dissertation. While this project was explicitly focused on leadership profiles, another complementary study could then evaluate allocation of HSI funds to provide a deeper analysis of the relationship between leadership and spending.

The interview protocol for this dissertation included a question addressing the relationship each CCCP shared with their Board of Trustees, which warrants further investigation. It was asked during the interview, “How does the Board of Trustees inform equity goals and agendas as an HSI?” Some presidents within the interviews conducted for this study shared a common vision with their boards and are centered around inclusive and anti-oppressive educational approaches. For example, they described how their institutions are on the forefront of progressive leadership through actions such as creating community messages of solidarity in the wake of national racial violence. Alternatively, some CCCPs shared that their boards are overstepping their bounds and are very intrusive rather than serving the advisory capacity expected of them. Some presidents described a shift in who is represented on the board of trustees, with representation of a more conservative and divisive perspective, focused on limiting spending of the budget on progressive resources, which is at odds with the state legislator’s goals for community colleges and the chancellor’s office. If CCCPs want to align themselves with HSI identity and close equity gaps, they need to find a more nuanced way to achieve those goals.
Thus, while this study reveals that there are interesting patterns to be uncovered regarding CCCPs relationships with their respective Board of Trustees at HSIs, there remains a gap in the literature addressing the role of the Board and how that relationship can be further explored in future research (Garcia, 2023).

The initial findings of this study revealed a throughline of racial consciousness as a theme connected and embedded within the other four major themes. Within examples of identity, adaptive competencies, style and strategy, racial consciousness served as a lens and critical point of departure for many of the CCCPs. Although the results of this study provide evidence of the role of racial consciousness as critical to CCCP leadership, the integration of an anti-racist philosophy and praxis have not been explored to the degree necessary. The focus on anti-racism is an important departure from this dissertation’s contributions that could comprise next steps for this research. In future projects, centering anti-racist frameworks from the start and then engaging with higher education leaders to see how they materialize or operationalize anti-racist frameworks into their approach to leadership could move the preliminary findings regarding racial consciousness from a general awareness towards a more activated leadership method. If future research examines the uses of anti-racist frameworks in higher education leadership, it may become clearer how racial consciousness can shift from an ideology to a praxis that contributes to shaping student outcomes.

**Broader Implications of an HSI Leadership Dissertation**

The legacy of systemic racism and discriminatory structures in the United States has had a profound impact in the Latinx community and the lives of all people of color especially in a post-pandemic era. This impact is evident in the disparities in educational attainment, employment opportunities, and wealth between people of color and white communities (Bleich et al., 2019; Milner & Braddock, 2020; Painter, 2013). Community colleges must acknowledge
and find ways to address these disparities through providing quality education if they are to achieve their equity goals in supporting students. CCCPs face a herculean task in trying to create a safe, equitable, and inclusive learning environment. They are tasked with finding ways to have productive dialogue about racial injustice without alienating or disenfranchising students, staff, board members, and their communities, despite these polarizing viewpoints. HSI leaders and CCCPs must be vigilant in their commitment to providing socially just and equitable learning environments in the face of efforts to politicize concepts around wokeness and state-level efforts to block racial equity work in higher education. Wokeness is an African American Vernacular term that refers to being aware of and actively working to challenge oppression, racism, and social problems facing marginalized people (Marsha ll & Wilson, 2023). HSI leaders and CCCPs can continue to lean into this work to ensure students feel seen.

It is only by engaging in these conversations and creating space to dismantle past discriminatory practices that leaders can find new disruptive interventions to pursue racial equity on California’s community college campuses. CCCPs need to feel empowered to advocate and prioritize policies that promote racial equity and allocate resources and support to ensure that students of all races and ethnicities have what they need to succeed.

Colleges are seeking healthy leaders, grounded in compassion, who can find imaginative solutions and are accountable to those they serve to move the needle on racial equity. This qualitative study is situated in a small body of research that examines the challenges and opportunities that HSI presidents face and provides additional depth in understanding how the experiences and values of CCCPs inform the way they lead their institutions.

This study provided a close analysis of CCCPs’ responses to leadership-focused interview questions and contributes to broader scholarly conversations on educational leadership, industry
equity-focused leadership, and research on the MSI federal designation of higher educational institutions. The study argues that how leaders at HSIs approach their role as CCCP has a direct impact on the campus culture of servingness, which can influence outcomes for Latinx students.

**Influence of Political Climate on Leadership**

This dissertation is situated in the political context of the moment. Other leaders trying to manage diverse employees in a climate that is divisive who read about how MSI presidents are attending to this can gain perspective and value for those trying to develop their own leadership in a similar climate. It is critical to recognize that the socio-political landscape influences leadership, as it is not insulated and influences both domestically and globally how leaders lead and what is at the forefront for leaders and constituents in regard to achieving organizational goals. On the local level, leaders report to the boards at their institutions and are required to navigate the expectations of the boards and students alike, although those expectations can be competing. Therefore, the tension between competing agendas puts presidents in a vulnerable position that can challenge their ability to move equity work when trying to manage the expectations of all parties they serve.

**Insider Access to CCCP Voices**

Limited research has centered the voices of college presidents due to their high-profile positions and their impacted schedules. Thus, the insider access to their perspective on leading a diverse, complex organization, can help other higher education researchers to understand motivations and the framework presidents use to navigate the multiple demands they face. This research brings identity to presidents rather than brushing them off as part of the problem to support other higher education researchers to have a sense of who CCCPs are and how their leadership profiles relate to the work they are doing. In addition to offering higher education
leadership researchers access to the voices of CCCPs, this dissertation provides a model for other organizational research and demonstrates the benefits of interviewing leaders in high profile positions.

**Closing Thoughts: CCCPs and HSI Futures**

Building authentic, trusting relationships on college campuses where Hispanic students feel welcomed, seen, and supported with institutional support initiatives to meet students’ needs will maximize opportunities to ensure success and increase transfer, workforce opportunities, and graduation rates. CCCPs must recognize the importance of the shifting student demographics to address not only Latinx students’ barriers to entry to college, but to also equalize outcomes for the largest growing segment of the student demographic in the United States. These efforts must move campuses from merely aligning their identity as a Hispanic Serving Institution to creating a clear focus on true service and advocacy as a Hispanic Graduating Institution (Acevedo, 2018; Garcia, 2020). Hispanic Serving Institutions are essential to workforce development and economic growth in the United States. Expansion of financial investment in HSIs with access to grant funding promotes the expansion of existing programming designed to achieve Hispanic students’ access, visibility, and success.

During the interview process, four presidents of color, all with new tenures, specifically mentioned Dr. Gina Ann Garcia’s research related to leading at a Hispanic Serving Institution. Two presidents physically showed me her newest book, *Transforming Hispanic Serving Institutions for Equity and Justice*, that was sitting on their desk and presented it to me via Zoom. One president was enthusiastic that he had booked her to speak at his Flex Day for faculty to discuss being a serving institution. President Lee had her speak at her inaugural address to set the tone for her presidency. Additionally, President Calderón shared how she collaborated with Dr. Gina Ann Garcia, including her in the Title 5 grant proposal to increase viability and potential for
receiving funds. CCCPs are trying to find ways to be intentional as a serving institution and utilizing Garcia’s text shows that they are trying to mobilize their goals in supporting Latinx students through targeted resources.

A leader's profile, including their skills and values, is key to creating an environment where Hispanic students thrive. Effective leadership that is responsive to the needs of Hispanic students can make a critical difference in improving their experiences and outcomes. This can have a direct impact on domestic sustainability and economic growth among Hispanic populations in the United States. This research extended the conversation focused on critical initiatives that achieve "servingness" of a college's MSI designation status (Garcia, 2019). Centering MSIs and the unique role they play in serving underrepresented and low-income students was instrumental to higher education research accomplishing civil rights goals through access and education.

The socio-political landscape of the past decade has presented CCCPs with an increasingly challenging environment for building consensus and crafting a unified vision that uplifts their Latinx students. Despite these hurdles, their responsibility to cultivate a safe, equitable, and inclusive learning environment remains unwavering. This dissertation has illuminated the critical role CCCPs play in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and creating systems that empower Latinx students to thrive. While the findings demonstrate their commitment to DEI work, they also reveal challenges in implementation. One key obstacle lies in building consensus across polarized viewpoints. In a politically divided climate, uniting stakeholders around a shared vision of equity and inclusion can be arduous. However, navigating these complexities and finding common ground is essential for any meaningful progress. The success of DEI initiatives also requires adequate time, resources, and
expertise. CCCPs must advocate for and secure the necessary support to implement effective programs. While challenges exist, CCCPs hold a unique opportunity to make a profound impact on the lives of their Latinx students. By prioritizing DEI work and designing systems that cater to their specific needs, CCCPs can pave the way for a more equitable future and empower Hispanic and Latinx students to reach their full potential.
Epilogue

My journey to this dissertation has been both personal and professional. It was a long road, filled with both profound purpose and challenges. As a first-generation Cuban-American and Latina educator and administrator, I have always been passionate about equity and access in education. My own experiences highlighted the challenges faced by many Latinx students, and this research helped me understand how colleges can better serve and support them.

Through interviews with 18 California Community College presidents, I gained valuable insights into their leadership approaches. Their dedication to equity and their commitment to centering Latinx student experiences were truly inspiring. I was motivated by the way many of the presidents were able to articulate a commitment to create a more just and equitable educational system that improves outcomes for Latinx students.

My research has significant implications for CCCPs and HSIs. First, it underscores the importance of racial consciousness in leadership. CCCPs who are racially conscious can better address the unique needs of Latinx students by integrating race into their decision-making processes. Second, the study reveals that CCCPs of color often engage in asset-based leadership, while white CCCPs may need further self-reflection on how their whiteness impacts their leadership. Finally, the study suggests that CCCPs should develop strategies for serving, rather than simply enrolling, Latinx students. This means intentionally focusing on their experiences and developing interventions that address their specific needs.

Given the growing number of Latinx students in community colleges, this research is timely. CCCPs play a vital role in ensuring that these students have access to the resources and support they need to succeed as intended by aligning with the HSI designation. Building on my research, I am committed to developing culturally responsive leadership programs for CCCPs. I
also plan to partner with HSIs to create evidence-based interventions that address the specific needs of Latinx students and support their success in higher education. I hope that my research will contribute to the efforts of CCCPs and HSIs in creating more equitable and inclusive educational environments for all students.

A Personal Journey

As I embarked on my doctoral journey, one of the first books I received was aimed at mid-career professionals pursuing a doctorate. This book emphasized that minimizing life changes was required for a smooth academic path and faster completion of the dissertation. However, my lived experience diverged significantly, highlighting the inherent unpredictability of life and the resilience required to navigate its twists and turns on the path to achieving one's goals.

My initial vision of doctoral completion alongside a stable career and personal life quickly dissolved. The college where I had been employed for many years closed its doors. Unstable career prospects spurred my need to pivot and inspired my motivation to enter the Ph.D. program. This upheaval coincided with the end of a decade-long romantic relationship, resulting in a physical relocation and an emotional adjustment to life as a single person.

Ironically, as I navigated these changes, I happily landed an aspirational role as a community college dean. Nevertheless, my new role presented its own challenges, demanding a delicate balance between serving the college's needs and maintaining the discipline required to complete my dissertation. Adapting to these new priorities led me to reshape my research focus and allowed me to deepen my understanding of myself as a scholar, leader, and lifelong learner. Pursuing my Ph.D. program became an integral part of my identity and served as an anchor amidst life's changes.
Shortly thereafter came the Covid-19 pandemic, quarantine, and isolation along with the social unrest surrounding the Black Lives Matter Movement. These events shifted my focus from the academic towards activism and recalibration, forcing me to reprioritize and re-evaluate my life's trajectory. The pandemic initially promised a slower pace conducive to writing, but serving students in crisis during was all consuming during this period of working from home during quarantine. The dissertation slowly inched forward but the progress was minimal, and my efforts at times felt futile and more of a cathartic exercise to understand what was going on in the world than a defined research proposal. Despite the upheaval, this period brought a newfound clarity and longing to create a family. Opting for solo parenthood, I embarked on a resolute journey, navigating the complexities of IVF amidst the challenges presented by the global pandemic. My unwavering commitment to my goals – career, motherhood, and academic pursuits – fueled every step. This journey culminated against all odds in the miraculous arrival of my son.

I defended my dissertation proposal four days after my son's birth. This was a pivotal moment in January 2023, launching me into a new era of motherhood and scholarship. While my academic progress coincided with my son's 111-day NICU stay due to a birth injury, my focus shifted to advocating for his care. Balancing fear and uncertainty with steadfast dedication, I discovered solace in my dissertation, finding purpose and a sense of progress amidst the emotional turbulence. While my son bravely navigated his early days in the NICU, I faced the dual challenge of supporting his recovery and completing my dissertation. This arduous journey wouldn't have been possible without the unconditional love and support of my mother, a constant pillar of strength and wisdom. Thanks to my mother, the incredible hospital staff, and a supportive community that encircled me, I was able to conduct the interviews for my study from my son's hospital room. This extraordinary experience underscored the transformative power of
community and strength of the human spirit. My son's journey was far from easy, requiring two surgeries, one nearly taking his life. Yet, his will to thrive fueled my own purpose and commitment.

The days in the NICU were a whirlwind of pumping, feeding, diaper changes, writing, and fleeting moments of sleep and meals. I embraced the constant chaos and lack of control, finding peace in the day-by-day progress of working on the dissertation. Week by week, the words flowed onto the page, mirroring my son's growth, and reminding me of the intricate dance between life's challenges and joys.

Mother's Day brought a double celebration, as my son's health improved, and the dissertation interviews neared completion. He was discharged from the NICU, marking another significant transition. Learning motherhood on my own without the skilled team of the NICU while finalizing the dissertation was daunting but I was inspired and gained momentum through watching my son grow and meet new milestones. The responsibilities of motherhood at home made finding writing time an ongoing challenge. Yet, I embraced the dynamic nature of both motherhood and scholarship, cherishing the small moments of joy and progress amidst the anxieties new mothers often face. The submission of the final draft of the dissertation marked a significant milestone of this incredible journey. A wave of accomplishment washed over me as I secured a date for my defense.

The Zoom virtual dissertation defense was a beautiful opportunity to showcase my research passion and purpose. The defense represented the culmination of years of research and reflection on leadership and social justice. With my son and mother by my side, I was officially introduced as Dr. Ryan Rodríguez for the first time. Tears streamed down my face, not just for the awe moment of achieving this academic accomplishment, but for the immense perseverance
and resilience this season of my life demanded. My son, a beacon of hope and strength, sat on my lap, symbolizing the future we would share with the completion of this long-awaited milestone.

The unexpected adversity on my doctoral journey became a catalyst for progress. This experience pushed me to explore the multifaceted dimensions of my identity as a mother, scholar, Latina, solo parent, career-woman, and caregiver. While I longed for the momentous occasion of my dissertation defense, it was the quiet hours the morning of the defense that held the most profound impact. Cradling my sleeping son, a sense of clarity washed over me. Though the dissertation remained significant, my life had shifted, becoming deeper and more meaningful than ever. Motherhood had redefined my priorities, reminding me that true strength and fulfillment reside in the everyday moments of love and connection.

Now, embarking on the next chapter, I carry this newfound perspective. Success, I realize, is not solely defined by degrees or titles, but by the love, compassion, and lasting impact we leave on the world. My journey, unlike the linear path often presented, was messy, beautiful, and transformative. I share my story not just to showcase the polished final product, but to reveal the raw journey that led me to completing my dissertation. I hope my story resonates with others, reminding them that the path to success is rarely smooth, but the journey itself can be immensely rewarding. The challenges we face often pave the way for unexpected growth and rewards. Carrying these lessons forward, I am fueled by a passion to create a positive impact, leaving a legacy of love, compassion, and equitable education for my son and generations to come.
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Appendix A: Participation Invitation Letter

Dear California Community College President,

My name is Christina Ryan Rodríguez, I am a doctoral student at Claremont Graduate University in the School of Educational Studies Ph.D. Program.

I am requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: California Community College Presidents’ Leadership Profiles: Adopting the HSI Designation. My intention is to gather qualitative interviews. Your participation in the research would be of great importance to California Community College Presidential Profiles by assessing the leadership profiles and dimensions of strengths of community college presidents to better understand how they shape campus efforts to support Latinx student initiatives.

If you would like to participate in the study, please read the Informed Consent letter below. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The study is anonymous; therefore, final reports will not include your name or any other identifying information including your college site. To begin the study, please sign and return the consent form to me along with the dates and times you may be available to meet virtually.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,
Christina Ryan Rodríguez M.S.Ed, Doctoral Student, Claremont Graduate University
Appendix B: Online Consent Form Pre-Interview Survey

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN (IRB #4410)
Letter of Consent

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN CA COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS’
LEADERSHIP PROFILES: ADOPTING THE HSI DESIGNATION

(IRB # 4410)
Dear California Community College President,

You are invited to be interviewed as part of a doctoral research study. Volunteering may not likely benefit you directly; however, you will providing valuable insights through your direct leadership experience in the field of higher education. As well you are providing me the data needed to complete this terminal educational study that will allow me to obtain my Ph.D. in Higher Education at Claremont Graduate University. If you volunteer and complete the informed consent, you will be asked to complete a 3-minute pre-interview survey and schedule at your desired time to participate in a Zoom interview. This interview will take about 60 minutes of your time. Volunteering for this study involves no more risk than what a typical person experiences on a regular day. Your involvement is entirely up to you. You may withdraw at any time for any reason. Please continue reading for more information about the study.

STUDY LEADERSHIP: This research project is led by Christina Ryan Rodríguez of the Claremont Graduate University, who is being supervised by her dissertation chair, Dean DeLacy Ganley.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: The purpose of this study is to understand California Community College presental profiles and where CCCPs may be situated on each MDLM dimension which allows them to enact or retreat in their leadership choices to shape a campuses effort to support Latinx students.

PURPOSE: This study is designed to investigate how California Community College Presidents leadership guides their engagement with Latinx student success initiatives at Hispanic Serving Institutions. I will interview California Community College presidents to collect data from them directly to capture their first-hand experiences in leadership approaches.

ELIGIBILITY: Interviewee must be a current California Community College President at an institution who have an enrollment demographic that reflects 25%+ Latinx enrolling, located in Southern California who has completed the consent form and pre-interview survey and is available to participate in Zoom interview.
**PARTICIPATION:** During the study, you will be asked to sign a consent form, complete a brief pre-interview survey, and respond to interview questions related to your current leadership position. This interview will take about 60 minutes of your time.

**RISKS OF PARTICIPATION:** The risks that you run by taking part in this study are being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life which may cause reflection or insights related to your position and relationships with your institution. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

**BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION:** I expect the study may benefit you personally. The benefits include elevating direct narratives of California Community College Hispanic Serving Institution Presidents by finding themes and discoveries which will provide insights and discoveries to the field for current and emerging HSI presidents and future college presidents. This study will benefit the researcher by allowing her to conclude her doctoral program with the successful submission and defense of this study. This study is also intended to connect CCCPs influence on campus goals and agendas that are intended to support students of Latin and Hispanic heritage as they navigate campus student success initiatives.

**COMPENSATION:** You will not be directly compensated for participating in this study. The benefit of your participation in this study as indicated above and will include the opportunity to share your career journey, thoughts, and goals regarding leading a California Community College. This research aims to support higher education research and shine a light on the experiences and connections CCCPs influence on their campus agenda.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop or withdraw from the study at any time without it being held against you. Your decision whether to participate will have no effect on your current or future connection with anyone at CGU.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your individual privacy will be protected in all papers, books, talks, posts, or stories resulting from this study. In addition, I may use the data we collect for future research or share it with other researchers, nevertheless, your anonymity will be secured, and your identity or specific college campus will not be revealed. To protect the confidentiality of your responses, I will secure our Zoom recordings by number and not label with any identifiable information. All files will be kept on a private password protected drive and will be under my sole oversight. After audio files are transcribed, they will be erased as an extra measure to protect participants. Transcriptions will be utilized for data analysis with all identifiable identifiers for both the college president and campus will be replaced with a pseudonym to preserve anonymity.

**FURTHER INFORMATION:** If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study, please contact me, Christina Ryan Rodríguez at (562)556-4560. You may also contact Dr. DeLacy Ganley, dissertation research supervisor at 909-621-8075 and via email at delacy.ganley@cgu.edu. The CGU Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approving this project. If you have any ethical concerns about this project or about your rights as a human subject in research, you may contact the CGU IRB at (909) 607-9406 or at irb@cgu.edu. A copy of this form will be given to you if you wish to keep it.

**STATEMENT OF CONSENT:** Your digital signature (or check acknowledgement) below means that you understand the information on this form, that someone has answered all questions you may have about this study, and you voluntarily agree to participate in it. You may print and
keep a copy of this consent form. IRB approval number 4410 approval number at CGU for this study is 02/28/2023 and it expires on 02/28/2024.

I have read the above information. I feel I understand the study well enough to decide about my involvement. By clicking the link below, I understand and agree to the terms described above. Please indicate your consent by clicking the link below.

Signature of Participant _________________________________ Date ____________
Printed Name of Participant _________________________________

The researcher has reviewed the information in this consent form with the participant and answered any of his or her questions about the study.

Signature of Researcher _________________________________ Date ____________
Printed Name of Researcher _________________________________

Please print or save this consent form for your records.

Pre-Interview Survey provided to participants via Qualtrics.

Thank you for providing your consent and agreement to participate in California Community College Presidents’ Leadership Profiles study. You are now being directed to a 3-minute 5 question pre-interview survey.

1. How many years have you served as a Campus president at the current institution?
2. Did you serve in an executive leadership role at your current institution or a different institution prior to the current presidency?
   a. <If yes>, What additional executive level leadership roles have you held and for how many years?
3. What was your highest degree earned?
4. How do you describe your gender identity?
5. How do you describe your racial/ethnic identity?

If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study, please contact me, Christina Ryan Rodriguez at (562)556-4560. You may also contact Dr. DeLacy Ganley, dissertation research supervisor at 909-621-8075 and via email at delacy.ganley@cgu.edu.
Appendix C: Interview Protocol

The following protocol includes the list of questions that will be included in interview portion of the study. Please note that the column, “Connection to Framework,” is provided to show the questions’ relationship to the concepts stipulated in the theoretical framework. The protocol will not be shared with participants.

**Introduction**
Thank you for agreeing to this interview regarding California Community College Presidents serving Hispanic/Latinx students. Although I will take some notes, I would like to record our interview so I can refer to it later, does this work for you? As you read in the consent form, this is part of my dissertation study. Your information will be kept confidential. I will be assigning you and your institution a pseudonym unless you’d like to select one now. As a reminder, if there is any question you would like to decline to answer, we can skip it, or if you need to stop the interview, you may do so at any time. The interview should last no more than 60 minutes. Do you have any questions before we start? If you’re ready, I’ll turn on the recorder and we can get started.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Connection to Framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What experiences or values inform how you approach your role as a community college campus president?</td>
<td>Leadership Schema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. As a CCCP, communication is an important aspect of your work processes. How would you describe your approach to communication across campus relations as a leader?</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. When addressing a new campus goal, how would you describe your leadership approach?</td>
<td>Leadership approach (substituted for gender)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How has your perception of community college president leadership changed based on the experiences you have had in this role?</td>
<td>Sensemaking &amp; Framing: Step-by-step, visionary, connective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How does the demographic of students you serve as a community college president influence your leadership approach or your leadership agenda?</td>
<td>Leadership Schema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up: How does the Board of Trustees inform these goals and agendas?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How would you describe the identity of your Minority Serving Institution in your own words?</td>
<td>Sensemaking &amp; Framing: Step-by-step, visionary, connective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Many MSIs serve highly diverse student populations, how do you reconcile that demand to make sure all students feel supported?</td>
<td>Competencies: Resource management, Minding the bottom line, advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Sensemaking &amp; Framing: Step-by-step, visionary, connective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up: How do you prioritize seeking funding for these populations?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. What is the difference between schools with a high Hispanic enrollment and Hispanic-serving institutions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How do you see your role as a president in relationship to framing student success initiatives for Latinx students at your community college?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up: What gaps are you trying to close through your student success initiatives for Latinx students?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. What current student success initiatives developed for Latinx students are being implemented at your community college? Can you please describe them?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Has your institution received funding as Hispanic Serving Institutions? If so, how much has your college received? Is the funding going towards any of the initiatives you described?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Does your college participate in professional development organizations related to being an HSI or other MSI?</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. IS there anything that we haven’t covered that you were hoping to discuss in this interview or that you would like to add?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Do have any questions for me?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>