

Educator Perspectives on School Counselor Advocacy as it Relates to the College Access of  
Underrepresented Students

by  
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## ABSTRACT

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(Under the direction of Dr. Patrick Akos)

Research indicates that minority students, economically disadvantaged students, and first-generation students are underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities. Literature encourages school counselors to act as advocates in their schools while addressing issues of inequity which include the college access of underrepresented groups of students. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the practice of high school counselor advocacy as it relates specifically to increasing access for students traditionally underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities. While theoretical literature encourages the practice of advocacy in schools, little research has been conducted that examines school counselor advocacy within this context. Twelve school counselors, three school administrators, and four mathematics teachers were interviewed regarding their perspectives on school counselor advocacy.

The initial presentation of the data utilized the research questions along with the Advocacy Competencies for Professional School Counselors. The research questions defined advocacy, described advocacy behaviors, and identified factors that impact the use of advocacy within this context. In addition, the advocacy competencies of dispositions, knowledge, and skills were utilized to gain a deeper understanding of the data. Participants defined advocacy by emphasizing the importance of empathy, a parental role, and an ethical disposition. Advocacy behaviors that were described included utilizing the two-year college, along with the skills of communication, collaboration, the use of data, family empowerment,

and systemic change. Finally, the participants identified relevant advocacy factors such as the school counselor's background, school counselor complacency, student ability, family barriers, role confusion, and district and state barriers. Context was identified as a necessary addition to the advocacy competencies.

School counselor advocacy was also examined within the context of the current state of education. Recommendations include the recruitment of potential school counselors that possess a disposition for advocacy and leadership along with graduate education and professional development in these areas. In addition, practicing school counselors can develop comprehensive school counseling programs that emphasize advocacy and equity for all students while promoting college access for underrepresented groups of students.

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## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

Research indicates many of our youth intended to continue their education after high school. In a study by Venezia and Kirst (2005), 88% of high school students surveyed planned to attend a post-secondary institution after graduation. In a North Carolina study, 73% of ninth graders planned to attend a four-year college or university after graduation. Twenty-one percent of these students intended to pursue a career requiring a four-year degree and 50% were interested in a career that required a master's degree or higher (Gibbons, Borders, Wiles, Stephan, & Davis, 2006).

Statistics showed there are numerous benefits to post-secondary education. The first benefit is an increase in income. In 2003, an individual with a bachelor's degree expected to earn an average annual income of \$49,900, while an individual with a high school diploma earned \$30,800 (Baum & Payea, 2005). In addition, unemployment rates fell as education levels increased and the poverty rate for college graduates was one-third the rate of high school graduates. Additionally, there were health impacts of higher education. Overall health improved as education increased, while smoking rates decreased (Baum & Payea, 2005). Also, there were societal benefits to higher education. Spending on social assistance programs decreased as education increased, while those with higher levels of education reported increases in volunteerism, voting, and blood donations (Baum & Payea, 2005).

However, research suggests there is a wide gap in college enrollment and graduation rates between students traditionally underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities (i.e. first-generation, African American, Latino, and economically disadvantaged youth), and

their peers that are not underrepresented in college. In 2001, 45% of White students ages 19-24 were enrolled in a post-secondary institution, as compared to 40% of African American students, and 35% of Latino students (Baum & Payea, 2005). Also, while African-American and Latino students comprise 32% of the college age population, only 18% of students at 4-year colleges and universities are African-American or Latino (Hawkins & Clinedinst, 2006). Additionally, there continues to be a gap in college enrollment patterns between first-generation students and their peers. First-generation students are those that will be the first in their family to potentially graduate from a four-year college or university. According to Horn, Bobbitt, and the National Center for Education Statistics (2000), first-generation students who were considered “highly qualified” (top 10 percent of their graduating high school class) enrolled in four-year colleges and universities at a lower rate than their peers. Twenty five percent of highly-qualified first-generation students had not enrolled in a four year university two years after high school graduation. In contrast, only one percent of their highly qualified peers had not enrolled (Horn et al., 2000).

In addition, Venezia and Kirst (2005) found that economically disadvantaged students and their families had less access to college preparatory information than their more advantaged peers. Also, socioeconomic status had an impact on the college enrollment rates of all students (Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). Forty-eight percent of economically-disadvantaged students did not enroll in college following high school graduation as compared to 11% of their peers in the highest income quartile. In addition, students that were economically disadvantaged were more likely to be a member of an underrepresented racial group and to come from a home where the parents have earned a high school diploma or less (Terenzini, et al., 2001). However, African American students in the lowest income quartile

attend college at a higher rate than their White peers (38% and 22% respectively). White students in the highest income quartile attend college at a higher rate than their African American peers (96% and 84% respectively). These data suggest that multiple risk factors, such as minority status and poverty, may interact and impact the likelihood of attending college (Bennett, Xie, & Michigan Univ. of Ann Arbor. Population Studies Center, 2000).

While the focus of this study is on college access, college graduation rates for underrepresented groups are related and show a large gap. African American and Latino students have a much lower attainment rate of the bachelor's degree than do Asian American or White students. Asian American students' graduation rates are 62.3% within six years, followed by 58% for White students, 42% for Latino students, and 36% for African American students (Edmonds & McDonough, 2006).

Through their professional roles and responsibilities, school counselors are in a unique position to advocate for increased college access for underrepresented students. The Education Trust has developed the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recently has developed the ASCA National Model (2003) to guide comprehensive school counseling programs. Both call for school counselors to utilize advocacy to ensure educational equity and access within their schools (American School Counselor Association, 2003; The Education Trust, 2003).

The literature regarding school counselors' impact on college access through the use of advocacy has been limited. Rather, educational research has been conducted on strategies to increase college access by all educational personnel. School counselors can use this research to increase college access for underrepresented students. Research (Sciarra & Whitson, 2007; Trusty, 2002) suggests an improvement of environmental school factors and

parental involvement positively impacted African-American and Latino student achievement. In addition, research (Horn et al., 2000; Horn & Kojaku, 2001; Trusty & Niles, 2003; Trusty, 2004; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001) indicates the completion of a rigorous (advanced math and science) course of study increases college access and graduation rates for underrepresented groups. School counselors are able to directly promote college access for these students through their position as advocates in high schools. School counselors can impact college access by promoting these relevant factors (Horn et al., 2000; Trusty & Niles, 2003). School counselors also directly impact the possibility of attainment of the bachelor's degree for these students by focusing on the use of advocacy to improve achievement and college access for underrepresented students.

The literature on advocacy as well as school counselor advocacy is primarily theoretical. The literature is consistent in calling for school counselor advocacy; however, school counselor advocacy in practice is not thoroughly understood. Literature (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Brown & Trusty, 2005; Erford, House, & Martin, 2003; House & Martin, 1998; House & Hayes, 2002; House & Sears, 2002; Trusty, 2004) is replete with definitions and frameworks of school counselor advocacy. However, only one study by Field (2002) provided research that describes a mixed method account of school counselor advocacy. This study was on school counselor advocacy generally, and did not focus on advocacy within the context of increasing college access for underrepresented students (Field & Baker, 2004). The definition and use of advocacy is specific to context, much like self-efficacy, and future research should investigate this phenomenon with specificity.

## Conceptual Framework

According to Brown and Trusty (2005), there are specific competencies that are needed by school counselors in order to be effective advocates. These competencies fall into three domains, which are dispositions, knowledge, and skills. School counselors should possess the disposition (e.g. personal values and beliefs) for advocacy as well as a core set of knowledge and skills in order to be effective advocates for their students and families. If a school counselor does not possess this disposition or does not obtain the required training, advocacy may be unsuccessful or may not even occur (Brown & Trusty, 2005). The conceptual framework, and its three domains, will be used to develop the research and interview questions for this study and analyze and make meaning of the data from this study.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to explore the practice of high school counselor advocacy as it relates specifically to increasing access for students traditionally underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities.

### *Research Questions:*

1. How do high school counselors and faculty define school counselor advocacy within the context of increasing college access for underrepresented students?
2. How do high school counselors advocate for underrepresented students in terms of college access?
3. How do high school counselors and faculty describe personal and environmental factors that impact school counselor advocacy in terms of college access?

### Limitations of the Study

The researcher believes that context has an impact on the use of school counselor advocacy so this phenomenon may appear differently in different situations or school settings. The study of advocacy within this particular context is very narrow, so therefore school counselors that advocate within different contexts may define advocacy differently. However, context in this study, while important, had less influence than anticipated. There was limited variance amongst different participants and schools despite distinct contextual differences. This limitation may be attributed to the narrow focus of this study and the focus of the interview questions. Subjects that chose to participate were particularly interested in this topic or felt they were knowledgeable about this subject and may therefore have skewed the results. Finally, the researcher acknowledges personal biases and an insider status with the participants being studied.

### Definition of Key Terms

To ensure a clear reading, four terms are defined below: *advocacy*, *systemic change*, *educational equity*, and *underrepresented students*. These terms will be used throughout the study and it is important that their meanings are defined within the context of this project.

1. **Advocacy:** Advocacy generally is defined as the act or process of pleading for a person or cause and an advocate is a person who argues another's case. The general premise of advocacy is that the environment (i.e. school, family, or community) is a central factor in determining a student's behavior as well as educational outcomes. A successful advocate should be able to intervene on behalf of a student and affect systemic variables or their decisions (Lee, 1998). In addition, from a preventative stance, school counselors have an

ethical responsibility to intervene in environmental systems that have the potential to limit the development of students (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2003).

There are three important advocacy processes for school counselors. First, school counselors must view helping as a systems in addition to an individual perspective. Second, school counselors enter into advocacy in partnership with their clients (students, families) and may teach advocacy skills. Finally, school counselors must understand change from a systems perspective and be adequately trained to create change in their school and community systems. The ultimate goal of school counselor advocacy is to empower the student to acquire the skills necessary to challenge future barriers by themselves (Lee, 1998). This study will define school counselor advocacy within the context of increasing college access for underrepresented students.

2. Systemic Change: Knowledge of systemic change is essential for effective advocacy. In order to create change within their schools, and challenge issues of equity, school counselors should understand the systems within their schools, community, and society in general. School counselors work with individuals in all of these systems (i.e. students, families, teachers, community members, and policy makers) in order to create the most change and impact students most effectively (Brown & Trusty, 2005). These systems are intertwined and intervening at many levels will encourage advocacy efforts (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2003).

3. Educational Equity: Educational equity is defined as equal opportunity for all students regardless of differences. School counselors can ensure equal opportunity for their students by emphasizing fair treatment for all students and allocating their time so all students and families have access to their school counselor. In addition, school counselors may

challenge policies and practices which do not emphasize equitable access for all students.

Within the context of college access, all students should have equal access to college preparation materials as well college preparation resources such as rigorous coursework and student support services (Bemak & Chung, 2005).

4. Underrepresented Students: The focus of this study will be on students that are traditionally underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities. This study will explore how school counselors advocate for increased college access for first-generation students, African American students, Latino students, and economically disadvantaged students. Many underrepresented students are members of more than one of these groups. These groups of students are underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities (Edmonds & McDonough, 2006; Horn et al., 2000). College access can be defined as the enrollment in four-year colleges and universities by these groups of students.

## CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature (Gibbons et al., 2006; Venezia & Kirst, 2005) reveals that students aspire to attend four-year colleges and universities in increasing numbers. However, there continues to be a gap in college enrollment and graduation rates between students traditionally underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities and their peers (Edmonds & McDonough, 2006; Horn et al., 2000). School counselors are professionals in the schools that given their training and position can become valuable advocates for underrepresented students. This literature review will examine the models of school counseling as well as how these models relate to and encourage advocacy. A conceptual framework will be examined for its connection to current research. This framework will also guide the present study. The review will discuss the challenges that underrepresented students face on their path to college along with the challenges that school counselors should address when becoming advocates. Successful strategies that show promise of narrowing this gap within our schools will be addressed along with current advocacy research.

The focus of this literature review is on the advocacy efforts of high school counselors. Advocacy efforts of elementary and middle school counselors would likely have a positive impact on underrepresented students particularly in the areas of parental education and in four-year high school planning. For the purpose of this study, high school counselor advocacy will be examined because the focus of high school counseling is often postsecondary planning for students. High school counselors implement more strategies that directly impact college access for students. The focus of this study will be limited to access to four-year colleges and universities. While there may be an access gap for other post-

secondary institutions (i.e. community colleges and vocational institutes), this gap is more pronounced at the bachelor's degree level. In addition, economically disadvantaged students attend two-year institutions at a higher rate than their more advantaged peers (56% versus 23%) (Terenzini et al., 2001), which may be due to school counselors advising low-income students to attend two-year institutions because tuition is often lower.

### History of Educational Inequity

In order to create a context for the current state of college access, it is important to understand the roots of inequity in our current educational system. Throughout our country's history, educational leaders and policy makers have been predominately upper-class, White, and protestant males (Tyack, 1993). They have created programs and policies to assimilate as well as segregate others (women, immigrants, minorities, Catholics, Jews, and those in poverty) through the educational system (Tyack, 1993). In addition, most programs focused on the individual differences of students and meeting those needs through programs such as differentiation and tracking. Failing to focus on the group identities of students allowed policymakers to avoid seeing inequities or discrimination. Starting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, White immigrants from Europe were the initial focus of educational leaders (Tyack, 1993).

#### *Immigrants*

Before immigrants and minorities began to enter the public schools, the student population was primarily White, upper-class children (Donelan, Neal, & Jones, 1994). Beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, leaders in the National Education Association declared that all immigrant children should attend school to learn English as well as the morals and civic

responsibilities that come with being an American. Many of these leaders felt that these new immigrants were inferior intellectually and morally and that they must become “Americanized” (Tyack, 1993). Patriotism and the accompanying paranoia that came with World War I charged American schools with creating patriots (Tyack, 1993). In addition, children of immigrants and the lower-class were separated into coursework based on academic performance and career aspirations. The result was immigrants and economically disadvantaged children were sorted into lower-level academic courses. These lower-level courses included a vocational curriculum because educational policy makers at the time believed these students needed practical work skills that correlated with the job market (Donelan et al., 1994).

### *African Americans and Latinos*

Despite the discriminatory practices towards White immigrants, educational policymakers treated minority groups such as African Americans and Latinos differently. Even though many educational leaders believed that immigrant groups were intellectually inferior, they still believed that they could be assimilated into mainstream culture. This was not the case for minority groups who were seen as inferior races (Tyack, 1993). Following the Civil War, African Americans joined together to form their own schools. When southern Whites regained control of the school system following Reconstruction, they designed an educational system to subordinate African Americans and deny them the rights of citizens (Tyack, 1993). In 1896, the Supreme Court legalized the system of segregation in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The court ruled that segregation was legal as long as educational and other public facilities were equal (Jones & Hancock, 2005).

Mexican Americans were also discriminated against in states such as Texas and California. They were sent to separate schools because educational leaders felt they had unique needs. By the 1920s, nearly 40% of Mexican children in Texas did not attend school and even those that did often dropped out in the early grades. The prevailing thought was that Mexicans needed only a minimal education because they were destined for manual labor (Tyack, 1993).

In the early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many African Americans struggled with the difficult decision of whether to push for desegregated schools. Despite being vastly underfunded, many African American schools were seen as caring, nurturing, and an extension of the community with high parental involvement (Tyack, 1993). If African Americans accepted segregated schools, they accepted their lack of status as citizens. However, if their children attended desegregated schools, they risked losing African American educational positions and having their children attend school in a hostile and prejudicial environment (Tyack, 1993).

Reform began to occur during the depression and the advent of New Deal programs. Many New Deal activists helped poor African Americans through educational and employment programs. In addition, during World War II, the inequity of African American schools was highlighted when twice as many African Americans as Whites were rejected for military service. The most common cause was the failure to meet educational requirements. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled on school segregation in the legendary *Brown* decision, declaring school segregation unconstitutional. However, school desegregation did not happen immediately. Ten years later, over 90% of African American children still attended segregated schools (Tyack, 1993). The passage in 1965 of the Civil Rights Act accelerated

school desegregation (Tyack, 1993). However, despite school desegregation, many minority children were tracked into the lower-level coursework that had been in existence since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Donelan et al., 1994). They joined economically disadvantaged children in coursework that would not prepare them to enter a college or university. In addition, since the 1980s, schools have begun to rapidly re-segregate by race and socio-economic status (Jones & Hancock, 2005).

All students whether they are economically disadvantaged or not, achieve at a lower level if they are in a school with high levels of poverty. These schools have greater needs than schools that do not have high levels of poverty. Schools that are economically disadvantaged receive additional funding through Title I, which was originally authorized in 1965 as a part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). However, the funding provided through Title I has always been controversial and in 2002 as a part of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the funding was reduced by 20% to pay for tutoring and transportation for students attending low-performing schools. Research indicates that large school districts do not always distribute Title I funds equitably amongst the high poverty schools (Brown, 2007). In addition to low-levels of academic achievement, research also indicates that the higher the level of poverty in the school, the less time school counselors are able to devote to post-secondary admission counseling, which may impact college access for these students (Hawkins & Clinedinst, 2006).

Despite the long history of inequity, segregation, and tracking in our schools, school counselors did not play a large part in the educational system until the 1950s. School counselors have only been seen in schools on a widespread scale for approximately 50 years. Roles and responsibilities of school counselors have changed dramatically throughout this

time and recently the emphasis has focused on the use of advocacy to promote social justice and equity in schools.

## School Counseling

### *Background of School Counseling*

The first documented guidance program in schools dates to 1889, when a principal in Detroit, Jessie Davis, introduced a guidance curriculum that would be delivered in English classes (Bauman, Siegel, Faico, Szymanski, Davis, & Seabolt, 2003). The dawn of the industrial revolution introduced more vocational counselors to schools. Students needed to be better prepared to enter a changing workforce, and teachers who also worked as vocational counselors guided students to select and prepare for appropriate career choices. These teachers performed counseling duties in addition to their typical teaching load. As the years passed, educational reform along with social and political events shaped the role of guidance in the schools (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). Research indicated that individual differences contributed to educational and vocational satisfaction, therefore testing emerged as an important function of guidance (Herr, 2002). By the 1940s, the vocational focus was being overshadowed by a more clinical counseling focus along with the emphasis on testing (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001).

School counseling was officially recognized as a profession by the forming of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) in 1952 (Bauman et al., 2003). However, school counselors were not placed in schools in large numbers until after the launch of “Sputnik” by Russia. Following this scientific achievement by the Russians, Congress determined there was a need for more trained scientists and engineers. The passage in 1958

of the National Defense Education Act provided more science and mathematics education in schools. Talented young people needed to be identified who could excel in these fields and school counselors were identified as the individuals who could assess promising students and ensure they received the training necessary. The Act therefore provided funds for the training of additional school counselors (Herr, 2002).

The ramifications of this act were the creation of a gatekeeper role for the school counselor. Gatekeepers are individuals who decide which students will receive the training necessary to continue their education after high school. In this context, gatekeepers discouraged certain students from participating in coursework that would enable them to become prepared for college education. School counselors did not educate all students on the requirements necessary to attend college. The school counselor sorted and selected gifted students from the general student population and ensured that these students enrolled in four-year colleges and universities (Herr, 2002).

By the 1960s, most teacher counselors had been replaced by full-time school counselors. Finally, in the 1970s the concept of a developmental guidance program was introduced. This concept was driven by a renewed focus on vocational and developmental guidance (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). A developmental guidance program mandated that counseling services be provided that was developmentally appropriate and that school counselors work with all students to reach their potential. College began to be recognized as an option that was available for all students. Implementation and development of comprehensive programs continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s until recent years when organizations such as the Education Trust and ASCA created reform models for school

counselors. These models include key tenants such as the philosophy of college access for all students and the use of school counseling strategies to attain this goal.

### *Contemporary Counseling Models*

#### *Transforming School Counseling Initiative*

In 2003, the Education Trust introduced the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI). The TSCI emphasizes the use of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, counseling, assessment, and the use of data to promote equity in schools. This model has been pivotal in the movement to transform school counseling. The TSCI has promoted the use of school counselor advocacy to increase opportunities for all students, particularly those that have been traditionally underrepresented. In addition to the TSCI's five domains essential for school counseling programs, they also identified eight elements for change within graduate preparation programs. Table 2.1 highlights the essential elements from the Educational Trust initiatives. The elements for change in graduate education should prepare more school counselors to become advocates. Graduate education provides practicing school counselors with the skills necessary to implement effective programs.

Perusse and Goodnough (2001) examined the perceived importance of Educational Trust initiatives, many of which focus on advocacy and equity, for counselor educators through a quantitative study. A total of 332 questionnaires were mailed to counselor education programs. A total of 195 were returned for a return rate of 59%. The results of this study validate the concern that many counselor educators are still focusing on the individual student instead of systemic change. One of the highest rated items was preparing school counselors to perform brief counseling interventions in their schools.

Table 2.1: The Educational Trust Domains for Transforming School Counseling

School Counseling Programs	Counselor Education Programs
Leadership	Criteria for Selecting and Recruiting Candidates for Counselor Education Programs
Advocacy	Content, Structure, and Sequence of Courses
Teaming and Collaboration	Methods of Instruction
Counseling and Coordination	Induction into the Profession
Assessment and Use of Data	Working relationship with community partners Professional development for counselor educators University/school district partnerships University/state department partnerships

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(House & Sears, 2002; Perusse & Goodnough, 2001; The Education Trust, 2003).

In contrast, two of the three lowest rated items contained the word school-wide. These items related to teaching prospective school counselors how to use data to address access and equity in their schools as well as the use of data for school-wide planning and change. Both of these items were taken from the domain which emphasized advocacy and educational equity.

In a follow-up study (Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004), questionnaires were mailed to a random sample of 1000 school counselors, 500 secondary school principals, and 500 elementary school principals. This study assessed the perceived importance of the TSCI's five domains for change in school counseling programs. Respondents represented all

fifty states and were representatively drawn from urban, suburban, and rural schools. Sixty-four percent of school counselors, 51% of secondary principals, and 44% of elementary principals responded. TSCI items that were rated highly included programmatic leadership, brief counseling, and implementing a preventative school counseling program.

Within the domains of the TSCI, items that contained the words data and school-wide were again among the lowest rated items by school counselors and administrators (Perusse et al., 2004). The Education Trust emphasizes the use of data by school counselors to impact systemic, school-wide change. The Education Trust has argued that school counselors must push for systemic change and monitor data to ensure equity for all students (The Education Trust, 2003). Results from this study (Perusse et al., 2004), indicates many school counselors and administrators do not see the school counselor's role as integral to school-wide change. Many school counselors defined their role in a similar manner as their administrator. This finding indicated the administrator helps define the roles and responsibilities of school counselors. In addition, the use of advocacy may be impacted by the administrator. School counselor advocacy is defined and driven by national models such as the TSCI. In addition to the TSCI, ASCA has developed a framework for school counseling that includes the use of advocacy.

#### *American School Counselor Association National Model*

The Education Trust, among others, collaborated with ASCA to develop the ASCA National Model (American School Counselor Association, 2003; The Education Trust, 2003). The ASCA National Model provides a framework for comprehensive school counseling programs. A comprehensive school counseling program should meet the needs of students

within three domain areas: academic, career, and personal/social. Within the academic domain, school counselors focus on implementing programs that directly impact the academic success of students such as study skills and time management strategies. In addition, school counselors in the career domain focus on strategies that enable students to discern how their interests, personalities, abilities, and values lead to an appropriate choice of careers. Finally, within the personal/social domain, school counselors implement programs that address the personal and social development of students such as classroom guidance that focuses on character education or a group counseling session on anger management. The goal of all three domains is to improve academic achievement for all students. The ASCA National Model includes elements from the TSCI and calls for school counselors to utilize leadership, advocacy, and collaboration to meet the needs of all their students and ensure educational equity (American School Counselor Association, 2003). Currently, no data exists on the effectiveness of the ASCA National Model.

Driven by the ASCA National Model, ASCA also addresses the specific requirements of high school counselors. High school counselors should develop programs that specifically address the developmental needs of high school students while still aligning their program with ASCA standards. They may conduct classroom guidance lessons on topics such as organizational skills, post-secondary planning, career planning, substance abuse, and peer relationships. During individual planning sessions, school counselors and students work on setting goals and transition plans for after high school. Finally, high school counselors collaborate with parents, students, teachers, administrators, and the community to promote a school counseling program that meets the needs of all their students (Hawkins & Clinedinst, 2006).

### *Summary*

Historically, school counselors have relied on a client-centered counseling approach. This approach emphasized passivity and reactivity to the student. The impetus was placed upon the student to change. The proposed focus is on systemic, school-wide change along with a focus on the individual student that connects to the school's central mission to improve academic achievement for all students. The classical training model did not encourage advocacy nor produce the types of school counselors that were likely to intervene on behalf of their students (Baker, 2004). The traditional models of school counseling are not reaching all students and advocacy as part of a comprehensive school counseling program is needed to reach students that are not currently being served.

### Advocacy Research

There has been a paucity of research on the topic of school counselor advocacy. Literature on advocacy within other educational contexts begins to define advocacy in schools. Sutton (1998) examined the use of teacher advocacy and social scaffolding in three college preparatory programs for students traditionally underrepresented in college. The study was conducted in California high schools. Through the use of mixed-method strategies, Sutton found that these teacher advocates played an essential role in the academic success of their students. They functioned as the link between the student and the school by interpreting the hidden curriculum, which was defined as the rules and processes that placed these underrepresented students at a disadvantage. Social scaffolding was provided through instruction in academic success skills such as tutoring, study skills, and time management. Finally, the advocate worked with the students to navigate the power structure of the school

by developing relationships with those in authority as well as their classmates. Secondary data from these programs showed participating students had increased grade point averages and college going rates (Sutton, 1998). Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) was one of the college access models studied by Sutton.

AVID also had positive effects on college preparation in five Texas school districts. AVID schools, in contrast to non-AVID schools, saw an increase in advanced course enrollment, Advanced Placement (AP) testing, graduation rates on the advanced graduation track (the highest in Texas), and overall graduation rates (Watt, Powell, & Mendiola, 2004; Watt, Powell, Mendiola, & Cossio, 2006). AVID requires that students take a rigorous college preparatory course of study while increasing access to college preparatory information. Students are taught study, test taking, and time management skills while gaining tutoring assistance in order to be successful in their courses (*Advancement Via Individual Determination*, 2006). These success skills fall into the category of social scaffolding as defined by Sutton (1998). Many of the components of AVID can be implemented by school counselors through advocacy efforts regardless of whether their school has implemented AVID.

Additional college preparatory programs such as GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) share the goal of increasing college access for underrepresented students. GEAR UP was authorized as a part of the 1998 Higher Education Act. GEAR UP targets economically disadvantaged and first-generation students and provides them with academic advising, personal counseling, tutoring, cultural activities, academic enrichment, mentoring, and promotes parental involvement. A New Jersey study followed five cohorts of students and their four-year college enrollment rates ranged from

61% to 100%. They compared these enrollment rates to those of economically disadvantaged students (48%), African American students (56%), and Latino students (49%) (Heisel, 2005).

While examining the academic success of six Hispanic students, Jodry (2001) developed the Hispanic academic advancement theory. Jodry conducted an ethnographic study of six academically successful students to understand the reasons behind their success. She identified three factors, 18 sub-factors, and 12 relationships that were integral to their success. Some of these factors included communication, positive adult relationships, a climate for caring, collaboration, advocacy orientation, high expectations, development of self-advocacy, and parents as assets. Some of the key relationships included the parents and the high school counselor. Many of the students participating in the study spoke favorably of their school counselor and four of the six students stated that their school counselor was responsible for motivating them to enroll in rigorous coursework (Jodry, 2001). While not generalizable, the Hispanic academic advancement theory aligns with the theoretical advocacy literature base and utilizes much of the education and skills of the school counselor.

Advocacy within other contexts begins to define the environment in which a school counselor practices. In order to more fully understand school counselor advocacy, it is important to understand whether the school environment helps to define a school counselor's role. Fitch and Marshall (2004) showed there is a difference in the role and responsibilities of school counselors in high and low-performing schools. School counselors in 63 Kentucky schools were surveyed regarding the perceived importance of various school counseling duties as well as how much time they spent on each function. School counselors in low-performing schools perceived that advocacy was more important than those in high-performing schools. Also, there were differences in the amount of time spent in program

areas. School counselors in high performing schools spent more time on program management, evaluation, research, adhering to professional standards, and coordination. All of these functions are essential when implementing comprehensive school counseling programs such as the ASCA National Model. While advocacy was rated highly by school counselors in low-performing schools, they did not spend significantly more time on this function or any other functions than did their counterparts in high-achieving schools. This research indicated school counselors in low-performing schools may have the disposition to practice advocacy because they believed advocacy was very important. However, their counterparts in high performing schools are implementing programs that are systemic and have greater potential to reach more students and impact change (Fitch & Marshall, 2004). These findings define the differences in a school counselor's role within the context of high and low-performing schools.

Within the advocacy literature, there is a considerable lack of empirically based research to clearly define what school counselor advocacy is and what advocacy looks like in practice. The only research on school counselor advocacy was conducted by Field (2002) and was a mixed method study as part of dissertation research to more clearly define school counselor advocacy as well as to determine whether school counselors were acting as advocates. In the quantitative portion of her mixed method study, Field (2002) conducted an analysis of 92 school counselors in a Southeastern state to measure the use of advocacy behaviors. Overwhelmingly, school counselors reported that they frequently engaged in advocacy behaviors and performed all 25 of the behaviors used on the survey.

In addition, qualitative research was used due to the dearth of empirical research on the topic and the lack of a valid instrument measuring advocacy competencies. The

researchers conducted two focus groups with a total of nine high school counselors from the same Southeastern state. Both focus groups were conducted using the same six questions, which included personal definitions of advocacy, personal meaning of advocacy, school counseling advocacy behavior, evidence of successful advocacy, advocacy training, and environmental factors which impact the effectiveness of advocacy.

Several themes emerged as a result of the study. The first theme emphasized taking a stand and going above and beyond what was normally requested of the counselor. The second theme centered on maintaining an individual focus on the student. The school counselors indicated a willingness to advocate for students in special situations because they develop these relationships and they advocate for students when they feel their assistance is needed. Thirdly, school counselors stressed the importance of advocacy as a belief system as well as a personal willingness to be unpopular. In addition, school counselors felt that support from the administrators in efforts to advocate for students verified that advocacy was successful. School counselors stated this support was the result of an awareness of their roles and responsibilities. Finally, school counselors were asked where they learned to be an advocate. According to the school counselors, advocacy was learned through formal training and indirect modeling by colleagues that were successful advocates. They believed that certain personality traits, such as altruism, encourage the use of advocacy. Five of the respondents believed these traits were innate and not learned (Field, 2002; Field & Baker, 2004).

Field (2002) also found several barriers to advocacy as a result of her mixed method study. The first was a vague job description which resulted in clerical work being assigned to school counselors. The second was a general feeling of being undervalued within the school

environment. School counselors experienced a lack of professional respect and communication amongst faculty as to when a school counselor was expected to intervene. School counselors also emphasized the potential of an administrator to either support or inhibit an advocacy initiative. Often, administrators did not understand how to properly utilize school counselors in their dual roles as mental health professionals and as educators. Instead, administrators often assigned clerical tasks (Field, 2002; Field & Baker, 2004).

Theoretical literature (see, for example, Bemak, 2005; House & Hayes, 2002) consistently defines the advocacy role of the school counselor. This literature is also clear in the need for school counselor advocacy. Literature, with the exception of Field (2002), does not define empirically what school counselor advocacy looks like in practice. School counselors in Field's study stressed the importance of a disposition for advocacy, knowledge of dispute resolution, and the skills to communicate the necessity of a school counseling program. Also, research (Sutton, 1998) indicates that teacher advocacy and social scaffolding had an impact on the success of underrepresented students. Teachers in Sutton's study possessed a disposition for empowerment of students and knowledge of resources. Research conducted by Sutton (1998) and Field (2002) are models for further research. Sutton (1998) examined teacher advocacy within the context of increasing college access for underrepresented students. Findings from this study can be used to explore this topic from a school counselor's perspective. Results from Field's (2002) qualitative study help to define school counselor advocacy although they were not context specific. Results from the study were very general. Additional research is needed specifically within this context because literature (Bennett et al., 2000; Edmonds & McDonough, 2006; Horn et al., 2000; Venezia & Kirst, 2005) indicates that there is an enrollment gap in four-year colleges and universities

between underrepresented students and their peers. This is an area in which school counselors can focus their advocacy efforts while having an immediate impact on their students. In addition, school counselors may define advocacy differently within the context of college access. Future research may show that advocacy is context specific and defined differently by school counselors when they are given different scenarios.

### Need for School Counselor Advocacy

School counselors are essential to educational reform because they have access to student data and records that can identify school-wide issues of equity. Through the use of data, school counselors can identify and advocate for the removal of institutional barriers within their schools that may contribute to a college access gap between underrepresented students and their peers. Examples of barriers include tracking policies; rigid prerequisites for upper-level course work, an unwelcoming school environment for underrepresented parents, and a lack of college preparation information in multiple formats (i.e. paper copies versus email/web only). Additionally, school counselors can become agents of change by advocating for a focus on the family, school, and community. This focus will impact students systemically and increase their potential for access to four-year colleges and universities (Gibbons et al., 2006).

Gibbons et al. (2006) surveyed approximately 600 ninth graders in North Carolina from seven different school districts, which represented the diversity of the state. A total of 232 surveys were returned and 222 were utilized, resulting in a return rate of 37%. The survey determined the career and college needs of ninth graders. Results indicated that school counselors were viewed as the “least helpful” regarding their future college and career plans.

They also indicated that parents were some of the most helpful influences in their lives. Recommendations from the study included educating parents because they would reach students directly. This may necessitate extensive family advocacy in order to increase college access (Gibbons et al., 2006). Research indicates that many students have an apathetic or even negative view of school counselors and students speak with parents and teachers about plans for a college education more frequently than their school counselor. However, research (King, 1996) does indicate that when a school counselor believes a student should attend college, the likelihood increases that this student will plan to attend. This belief had the strongest impact on college planning among economically disadvantaged students.

Advocacy in school counseling can be used to ensure equity within the school. Erford (2003) stated:

Not addressing the need for educational change and continuing to foster low expectations and inadequate academic preparation for poor and minority students is paramount to benign neglect. Professional school counselors support this neglect when they intentionally or inadvertently become part of the system that relegates large numbers of students to limited career options and virtually closes the door on their futures. p. 11

School counselors have a professional and ethical responsibility to all of their students. All students deserve the same access to educational opportunities within the school, as well as the option to attend college. The option to attend college includes equal access to college preparatory programs and curriculum. While school counselors may recognize the need for advocacy, a more thorough understanding of Brown and Trusty's (2005) advocacy competencies can lead to more effective advocacy practice within this context.

## Advocacy Competencies for Professional School Counselors

According to Brown and Trusty (2005), there are specific competencies that are needed by school counselors in order to be effective advocates. These competencies fall into three domains, which are dispositions, knowledge, and skills. Table 2.2 highlights the essential competencies for school counselor advocacy. This section is organized by addressing the three main domains, and when applicable the sub-domains were also used to organize the literature.

### *Advocacy Dispositions*

The disposition of a school counselor is driven by their personal values and beliefs. An advocacy disposition indicates that a school counselor is aware of their role as a student advocate and they embrace this role. In addition, they recognize the role that families play in the development of students and they join these families to advocate for their students. Effective school counselors understand that advocacy extends past students and families, and they advocate eliminating iniquities that affect all people. Finally, a school counselor will possess a basic ethical disposition in which they highly value their code of ethics and use this code to effectively tackle advocacy dilemmas. Without a disposition toward advocacy, even the most highly trained and skilled school counselor may not be inclined to practice advocacy.

### *Ethics*

School counselors have an ethical duty to advocate for students. The American Counseling Association (ACA) includes advocacy in its code of ethics. ACA is the parent organization to ASCA. Advocacy is addressed in standard A.6.a. Advocacy.

Table 2.2: Advocacy Competencies for Professional School Counselors

Dispositions	Knowledge	Skills
Advocacy	Resources	Communication
Family	Parameters	Collaboration
Support/Empowerment		
Social Advocacy	Dispute Resolution	Problem-Assessment
Ethical	Advocacy Models	Problem-Solving
	Systems Change	Organizational
		Self-Care

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(Brown & Trusty, 2005)

It states that counselors should utilize advocacy when appropriate at all levels to examine potential barriers to the growth and success of clients. Advocacy is also addressed in standard A.6.b. Confidentiality and Advocacy. This standard states that counselors should obtain the client's consent before engaging in advocacy so that they may work together in the removal of systemic barriers (American Counseling Association, 2005). Brown and Trusty (2005) emphasize the need for an ethical disposition in order to practice advocacy.

#### *Personal Barriers to Advocacy*

Toporek (2000) suggests that counselors must thoroughly study professional and ethical issues before engaging in advocacy. Some counselors oppose advocacy because counseling has often been seen as an apolitical discipline. In addition, students and parents may view counselor advocacy as condescending. The counselor must also examine his or her motivations for becoming an advocate. Becoming an effective advocate entails involving oneself in the personal life of a client with ethical issues of dual roles where boundaries could

be violated. Training in counseling has typically encouraged client independence and responsibility while de-emphasizing environmental issues. Specifically, many counselors have not been trained in the importance of external barriers that impact the lives of their clients and may not recognize the importance of these barriers (Toporek, 2000). School counselors can overcome these barriers by focusing on advocating for families, empowering families and students, and by studying their code of ethics (Brown & Trusty, 2005).

### *College-for-all*

According to Brown and Trusty (2005), school counselors that carry the belief that all students should go to college may also possess a disposition for social advocacy. However, according to Krei and Rosenbaum (2001), the overall demand for advocacy may also have unintended consequences for students that are poorly prepared for college education. Many school counselors are now emphasizing a college-for-all philosophy and are encouraging all students to pursue college regardless of a student's academic ability. This over-emphasis on college may be a result of school counselors becoming increasingly sensitive to their legacy as the gatekeeper. In a qualitative study of 35 high school counselors in Chicago, results showed that 23 of these school counselors encouraged all students to attend some type of post-secondary training. These school counselors did not state clear reasons as to why they advised all students to pursue college. Beyond the general recommendation for college, school counselors admitted they conducted very little career and college advising to enable students to select the post-secondary option that was right for them. School counselors expressed a reluctance to discourage unrealistic plans fearing negative consequences from school administrators or parents.

Twelve of the school counselors in the sample did attempt to tailor college plans for each student acknowledging that all students carry with them a range of abilities, goals, and expectations. The primary difference between the two sets of school counselors was that the 12 school counselors that did not encourage college-for-all were employed by high schools with a strong vocational emphasis. They felt that all students were not academically prepared to attend a four-year college or university (Krei & Rosenbaum, 2001). Advocacy for increased four-year college access does not imply that school counselors promote college for all without also promoting change within their schools which leads to college readiness for all students. A disposition for advocacy is essential to achieve these goals. However, as is shown by Krei and Rosenbaum (2001), school counselors need more than a disposition for advocacy to increase access to four-year colleges and universities.

### *Advocacy Knowledge*

Secondly, school counselors should possess advocacy knowledge in order to be an effective advocate. When advocating for students they need an overall knowledge of resources and parameters that are available in their school and community. Parameters are school policies and procedures, legal rights of families and students, and the overall reach of their programs. Dispute resolution mechanisms are another important aspect of effective advocacy knowledge for school counselors. Advocating for students often creates conflict and school counselors should be aware of how to resolve this conflict for the benefit of students. Additionally, a basic understanding of advocacy models is needed so they can use these frameworks to effectively advocate for students. Finally, school counselors also need

knowledge of systems change. When advocating for students, advocacy on many levels and across many systems will have the most widespread impact.

#### *ACA Advocacy Domains*

In addition to Brown and Trusty's (2005) advocacy competencies, school counselors should be aware of other advocacy models to enhance advocacy practice. ACA endorsed the Advocacy Competency Domains which detail how a counselor advocates for their clients or students. Examples of acting with a student include empowerment through the instruction of self-help skills. However, sometimes a counselor must act on behalf of the student in order to create change. Examples of acting on behalf of a student include identifying institutional barriers such as rigid prerequisites for upper-level coursework. Effective advocacy includes a systemic focus, which means that some advocacy efforts are focused on the student, some are focused at the school level, and some interventions are in the public arena (Lewis et al., 2003). School counselors can use these competencies to organize their advocacy efforts to affect the most change within their schools.

#### *Course Enrollment Patterns*

Research (Horn et al., 2000) indicates there is a considerable gap in enrollment in advanced mathematics courses between first-generation college students and their peers whose parents attended a four-year college or university. Data collected through the 1988-94 National Education Longitudinal Study, examined high school mathematics enrollment patterns of students who were considered high achievers in the eighth grade according to local standards. These high achieving students consisted of first generation students as well as their

peers. Sixty-three percent of high achieving first-generation college students completed one advanced mathematics course (beyond Algebra 2) in high school as compared to 83 % of their peers (Horn et al., 2000). Despite similar achievement levels and ability, there continues to be a discrepancy in enrollment in rigorous mathematics courses.

Another study by Zuniga, Olson, and Winter (2005) focused on the impact of tracking in science education and its impact on Latino students. The site for the study was a small Midwestern high school that had experienced a substantial growth of Latino students in a region that previously was predominately White. The school was currently utilizing a policy that placed many non-English speaking students into Track III, which was the lowest track and would not prepare them for current college entrance requirements. Track I was the college preparatory track and Track II would meet college admissions requirements although it was less rigorous than Track I. Researchers compared the percentage of Latino students with the percentage of non-Latino students enrolled within each of the school's three tracks. They also compared this data with student grade point average (GPA) and standardized science achievement scores. The results showed that nearly all non-Latino students were enrolled in Track I and most Latino students were enrolled in either Track II or III. In addition, GPA seemed to have little impact on student placement. Latino students scoring above the median GPA were consistently placed in the lower two tracks while non-Latino students scoring below the median GPA were disproportionately placed into Track I. Even Latino students that were fluent in English and performed well in school were placed into Track III. Nearly 64% of Latino students in the study stated an intention to pursue a college education. However, students in Track III would be less likely to complete the courses required for college admission (Zuniga, Olson, & Winter, 2005). School counselors that

understand the research on course enrollment will be more prepared to spot these inequities in their own schools.

### *School Variables*

In addition to inequities in course enrollment, several environmental factors positively and negatively impacted academic success for African-American students. African-American students that improve their achievement are more prepared academically to enter a four-year college or university. Involvement in extracurricular activities improved academic achievement and discipline problems contributed to academic failure. Good attendance increased the likelihood of graduating from a four-year college or university (Trusty, 2000; Trusty, 2002; Trusty & Niles, 2003). School counselors can examine school policies that may hinder student involvement in extracurricular activities and promote policies that may improve attendance. They can also examine data highlighting students or groups of students being disciplined and work with school personnel to eliminate any inequities. According to Brown and Trusty (2005), school counselors should understand the parameters of their individual school, and effective advocacy also requires an understanding of the legal rights of students and families. Within this context, students and families have a right to access college preparatory information.

### *Access to College Information*

Venezia and Kirst (2005), through Stanford University's Bridge Project, studied the connection between high school graduation policies and college entrance requirements utilizing a mixed method approach. Two thousand high school students and their parents

were surveyed in six different states. Students were both honors and standard level. The honors level curriculum is a rigorous curriculum designed to prepare students for college education and the standard curriculum is less rigorous although it often meets minimum requirements for college admissions. Teachers, school counselors and administrators were also interviewed at each school. Additionally, focus groups were conducted with small groups of ninth and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students. A majority of high school students in lower level tracks stated they did not have access to college preparatory programs or information sessions. In addition, lower-tracked students reported not having access to a school counselor. School counselors in the study held the general belief that only the most motivated students spoke to their school counselor and students believed college counseling was reserved for students only in the top tier academically. All students stated they were more likely to speak to a teacher about their college plans than the school counselor. Understanding the perspective of teachers is essential in order to increase college access of underrepresented students. Teachers indicated a lack of preparation for this role as well as a connection to colleges and universities.

In addition, Venezia and Kirst (2005) found there was an inequitable distribution of college information to parents that were economically disadvantaged. Parents indicated that most of the college preparation information they received was from high school counselors or other educational personnel. However, between 42% and 47% of economically disadvantaged parents received college information as compared to between 66% and 74% of parents that were not economically disadvantaged (Venezia & Kirst, 2005). A range is given because several states were sampled. This study highlighted the discrepancy between

economically disadvantaged students and their peers in the access to college preparation information.

Research (Horn et al., 2000) also indicated that first generation students did not receive extra assistance from school counselors, teachers, and other educators when choosing their academic programs despite the fact that these students received less guidance from their parents than their peers. Parental support was critical for all students because involvement, regardless of parent education levels, was strongly associated with course taking patterns in high school and enrollment in college (Horn et al., 2000; Trusty, 2004). School counselors can become knowledgeable about the parameters in their school and community. In addition, they can utilize resources to support parental involvement as well as increase the social and cultural capital of students and families.

### *Social and Cultural Capital*

Perna (2000) explored whether measures of social and cultural capital impacted four-year college enrollment decisions of African-American, Latino, and White students. Social and cultural capital can be defined as the unspoken language that enables one to belong to a group, in this instance a group that is college educated. For example, social and cultural capital could be relationships with those that are college educated along with having a full understanding of the policies, practices, and preparation that lead to college admission. Data from the third (1994) follow-up to the National Educational Longitudinal study was used to examine the research questions. In 1994, students in the study had graduated high school two years earlier. Perna (2000) found that lower college enrollment rates for Latino students were attributed to a lack of some types of capital; particularly test scores, college preparatory

programs, and educational expectations. Social and cultural capital was found to be as important as academic ability for African-American and Latino students. However, academic ability may be driven by social and cultural capital because capital may influence the choices these students have in regards to course selection. In addition, African American students had less access to the necessary information required to obtain a college education and meet their educational goals (Perna, 2000). School counselors can work to build social and cultural capital in students by exposing them to a college-going culture and connecting them to resources that may lead to college admission.

All of the research points to a substantial problem of equity within our schools between students underrepresented in 4-year colleges and universities and their peers. Some studies need to be replicated on a larger scale for their findings to be generalized (i.e. Zuniga et al., 2005). With the exception of Venezia et al. (2005), who utilized a mixed-methods design, all of the studies were quantitative in design. While underrepresented students face challenges to college access, school counselors must overcome their personal history as gatekeepers while advocating for programs that lead to college readiness for all of their students. Finally, in addition to a disposition for advocacy and advocacy knowledge, school counselors should possess certain advocacy skills to improve outcomes for underrepresented students. These skills can be used to implement successful strategies that are shown to increase college access.

### *Advocacy Skills*

Finally, school counselors should have a basic set of skills in order to practice advocacy effectively. Communication skills are essential for effective advocacy. School

counselors are trained in listening skills and must use these skills to then communicate problems and strategies. Collaboration skills are also important for effective advocacy. School counselors need the assistance of others in the school and community to affect change. Therefore, working with others and building relationships are vital to advocacy. In addition, school counselors should have problem-assessment and problem-solving skills. They need to be able to identify the problem and choose their battles. After identifying the problem, school counselors use existing theories and models to brainstorm solutions. Additionally, organizational skills are vital to managing an advocacy program. Also, to avoid burnout, school counselors should be able to care for themselves. Advocacy for others can involve risk-taking and efforts may not always be successful.

There are several strategies to increase college access for underrepresented students that may be impacted by school counselor advocacy. School counselors can utilize advocacy to increase college access within their schools by expecting all students to achieve at a high level; empowering students to help themselves by teaching self-help skills (Erford et al., 2003; House & Martin, 1998; House & Hayes, 2002; House & Sears, 2002; Jones, 2001; Trusty, 2004); and by obtaining training in advocacy and leadership (Bemak & Chung, 2005). Finally, school counselors can advocate for an increase in parental involvement and enrollment in rigorous college preparatory coursework for underrepresented students.

### *Parental Involvement*

Trusty (2002) used the data set from the 2002 National Educational Longitudinal Study to study the long-term educational development of African-American students. The research showed that for male African-American students, parental involvement and parental

expectations significantly correlated to improved achievement. For African-American females, parental expectations carried the strongest effects. Student motivation also had moderate effects on achievement. Quality of schooling and parental involvement indirectly improved achievement through increased motivation and additional coursework. These findings are particularly relevant because school counselors can advocate for increased parental involvement within the school environment to improve academic outcomes for students at risk of school failure (Anderson & Keith, 1997).

School counselors, through advocacy, can reach out to parents to educate them about the school culture and college entrance requirements. Research (Tornatzky, Cutler, Lee, & Tomas Rivera Policy Inst., Claremont, CA, 2002) conducted in Chicago with low-income Latino parents indicated that utilizing school counselors along with college representatives strongly correlated with overall college knowledge by these parents. Sciarra and Whitson (2007) found that Latino students who reported high parental involvement were one and a half times more likely to complete a bachelor's degree than their Latino peers with low levels of parental involvement. School counselors can utilize communication and collaboration skills to remove barriers within the school environment and make the culture more welcoming to African-American and Latino parents (Jones, 2001). Advocacy for parental involvement and education necessitates a disposition for family advocacy and empowerment, knowledge of school resources and parameters, and the use of communication and collaboration skills.

### *Rigorous Coursework*

One of the primary duties of high school counselors is course registration. School counselors use communication skills to build relationships with students and advise them on

appropriate coursework to meet their post-secondary goals. They also utilize collaboration skills by working with teachers and administrators to place students appropriately and they collaborate with families by meeting with them and educating them on the connection between rigorous coursework and college access. Research highlights the link between upper-level coursework and the college access of underrepresented students.

Horn et al. (2000) indicated that enrollment in advanced mathematics coursework increased the likelihood of enrollment in a four year college or university. Sixty four percent of first-generation college students who completed a course beyond Algebra 2 enrolled in a four-year institution as compared to 34% of their first-generation classmates who only completed mathematics coursework through Algebra 2.

Trusty and Niles (2003) and Trusty (2004), utilizing data from the 2002 National Education Longitudinal Study, found that several academic factors positively impacted the completion of the bachelor's degree. Generally, Asian and White students were more likely to finish college. However, when advanced mathematics courses were added, the effect of race or ethnicity became weaker, and the differences amongst ethnic groups for college completion rates decreased. Trusty and Niles (2003) did not find a significant difference between Algebra 2 completion and an advanced mathematics course beyond Algebra 2. Indirectly, mathematics ability did affect the likelihood of earning a bachelor's degree because high mathematics ability correlated with completing advanced mathematics courses (Sciarra & Whitson, 2007; Trusty, 2000). Completing one intensive science course (biology, chemistry, or physics), increased the likelihood of finishing college by 45 % (Trusty & Niles, 2003; Trusty, 2004). The completion of advanced mathematics and science courses are

connected to college access and graduation. In addition, completion of introductory mathematics courses correlate with college access for underrepresented students.

Paul (2005) indicated that the grade level at which a student completed Algebra 1 correlated with the likelihood of future completion of advanced mathematics and science courses as well as a college preparatory course of study. For example, 96% of students that completed Algebra 1 in the eighth grade successfully completed Algebra 2 whereas only three percent of students that took Algebra 1 in the tenth grade completed Algebra 2. Success in Algebra I is strongly correlated with college access. The Algebra Project promises higher levels of math achievement for minority and economically disadvantaged students. The root of the Algebra project curriculum is the idea that algebra can be taught earlier to students in grades K-12. Additionally, the mathematics teacher builds on the strengths of middle and high school students to increase understanding. Finally, the importance of mathematic success to future educational and career opportunities is continually emphasized (Kress, 2005). A study of middle school Algebra Project graduates in Cambridge, MA showed that 92% of the students transitioned to higher-level mathematics in the ninth grade (Roach, 2004).

In addition, research (Horn & Kojaku, 2001; Warburton et al., 2001) indicated that underrepresented students are less likely than their peers to take a rigorous college preparatory course of study. A rigorous course of study was defined as four years of English and mathematics (including precalculus or higher), three years of foreign language, social studies, and science (including biology, chemistry, and physics) and at least one AP course. When underrepresented students did enroll in a rigorous course of study, their college completion rates were comparable to their peers. When school counselors focus their advocacy efforts on college access through the completion of rigorous coursework, they are indirectly positively

influencing college completion rates. By encouraging students to enroll in rigorous coursework and giving them the skills to be successful in these classes, school counselors enhance the academic development of students while giving them more options for future careers.

School counselors are trained in collaboration and communication and therefore have the skills to lead a school-wide reform effort by advocating for all students (Erford et al., 2003). School counselors also use problem assessment skills to identify gaps and inequities within their schools. Advocacy requires collaboration and problem-solving with administrators and teachers to improve the school climate, increase parental involvement, and remove barriers to upper level coursework. Literature (Bemak & Chung, 2005; House & Martin, 1998; House & Hayes, 2002; House & Sears, 2002; Trusty, 2004) is replete with studies detailing strategies to improve college access for underrepresented students. However, there is a paucity of research on school counselor advocacy within this context; therefore, future research should examine this phenomenon.

### Conclusion

Students traditionally underrepresented in college education are enrolling in four-year colleges and universities at much lower rates than their peers (Baum & Payea, 2005; Horn et al., 2000; Terenzini et al., 2001). There is also a gap in college preparatory course enrollment and the existence of perceived and actual barriers for these students and their families (Horn et al., 2000; Zuniga et al., 2005; Venezia & Kirst, 2005). Literature explores some promising strategies for closing this gap which include the improvement of school environmental factors such as attendance, discipline, involvement in extracurricular activities, parental involvement

and education, and enrollment in rigorous coursework (i.e. high-level mathematics and science)(see, for example, Horn et al., 2000; Trusty & Niles, 2003; Trusty, 2004). School counselors can advocate for improved outcomes in all cases.

School counselors are being encouraged by ASCA as well as The Education Trust to implement a comprehensive school counseling program that will reach all students and ensure equity and access to college options (The American School Counselor Association, 2003; The Education Trust, 2003). School counselors can utilize their advocacy skills to attain this goal. Within the context of increasing college access for underrepresented populations, advocacy can be used in numerous ways. School counselors can advocate for a removal of school-wide and systemic barriers that prohibit access to college preparation information as well as enrollment in college preparatory coursework. School counselors can also utilize data to educate administrators and teachers concerning enrollment gaps in their own school as well as successful strategies for improving outcomes for these students. Finally, they can reach out to parents and teach them how to advocate for themselves and their children within the bureaucracy of the school.

School counselors should possess the disposition for advocacy as well as a core set of knowledge and skills in order to be effective advocates for their students and families. If a school counselor does not possess this disposition or does not obtain the required training, advocacy may be unsuccessful or may not even occur (Brown & Trusty, 2005). This framework will guide this research study by deepening the understanding of current advocacy practices and their alignment within this framework and its three competencies. The conceptual framework will be used to develop the research and interview questions for this study. Also, the conceptual framework will be used to analyze and make meaning of the data

from this study. The use of the conceptual framework will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

Literature suggests that there are a number of advocacy behaviors school counselors can engage in to increase access for their students. However, there is a paucity of literature empirically defining and describing school counselor advocacy within the context of increasing college access for underrepresented populations. Research is also needed to examine the factors that impact school counselor advocacy. It is believed that a qualitative study should be conducted initially to deepen the understanding of school counselor advocacy within this specific context before conducting large scale quantitative research.

### CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter describes the research method and design that was used in this study. In addition, this chapter discusses the purpose of the study, rationale for qualitative design, type of design, and the role of the researcher. The selection of the site and district will be addressed along with the selection of the study participants. The focus of the research was driven by the research questions, literature, pilot study, and the conceptual framework. The data collection section of the chapter will address collection methods including interviews and data review. Finally, data analysis, researcher trustworthiness, limitations, and significance of the study will be discussed.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this research was to explore the practice of high school counselor advocacy as it relates specifically to increasing access for students traditionally underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities.

#### Rationale for Qualitative Design

The goal of qualitative research, in general, is to deepen an understanding of human behavior. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined qualitative researchers as those who will “seek to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are” (p.43). School counselors and other school faculty were asked to construct their own personal meaning of advocacy within the context of increasing college access for underrepresented students, and these individual meanings were merged to create a more

thorough description of advocacy in practice. Additionally, Patton (2002) stated that “qualitative methods permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance” (p.227). In this study, data collection methods sought to understand how school counselors and other school faculty describe and define advocacy and how this personal meaning was acted upon and affected by contextual factors.

A qualitative design was used in this study to better understand the phenomenon of school counselor advocacy within this specific context. While there is a strong call for school counselor advocacy, there is very little research of any kind that extends beyond conceptual ideas. By using Brown and Trusty’s (2003) conceptual framework, this researcher hoped to gain added insight into practitioners’ understanding and use of advocacy. Advocacy, by definition, is the act of pleading for a person or a cause; therefore, advocacy was studied within this context because a broad study of advocacy would lack this focus and violate the core definition of advocacy. Consequently, initial qualitative studies should be conducted on this topic to broaden the understanding of this phenomenon.

### *Type of Design*

A phenomenological design was used for this study. “A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p.57). According to Creswell, the focus of phenomenological research centers on a description of the experience for a group of individuals that share the central concept or phenomenon being studied. The central phenomenon that was examined through this research is school counselor advocacy within the context of increasing college access for underrepresented students. School counselor advocacy was best studied using a

phenomenological approach because a deeper understanding of this phenomenon was needed due to the dearth of empirical research.

### *Role of the Researcher in Qualitative Research*

The researcher in qualitative research interacts directly with the study participants. There was the concern that this researcher's bias could affect the data. In this study, the researcher acknowledged a personal bias because of former employment in the district and knowledge of some of the study participants. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), researchers do attempt "to objectively study the subjective states of their subjects" (p.37). To be completely objective is a challenge; therefore there is a system of checks and balances that a researcher may put into place to enhance the credibility of the data and findings. These measures are discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

An integral part of phenomenological research is epoche or bracketing of the researcher's personal experiences. Bracketing is important because it allows the researcher to perceive the phenomenon "freshly, as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p.34). Moustakas does acknowledge that it is difficult to fully bracket one's experiences as a qualitative researcher. The researcher has experience working as a school counselor in one of the high schools in the study. This high school serves many students that are underrepresented in college and the researcher believed that school counselor advocacy is important to improve college access for these students.

Within this study, the researcher gained access to a district and a school where the researcher was previously employed. This created advantages and disadvantages. The problem of access was less difficult and the researcher easily established rapport with the

participants. In addition, most of the interviews were conducted with school counselors, and as a school counselor, the researcher functioned as a colleague as well as a researcher. The interconnectedness between the researcher and the participants can contribute to a mutual understanding which can lead to more accurate interpretations (Yeh & Inman, 2007).

Disadvantages included the researcher bias and subjectivity and the inability to separate one's self from the research. However, the researcher's former principal was no longer employed by the district and many of the researcher's former colleagues were employed by other schools in the district. At the time of this study, only two school counseling colleagues were employed at the researcher's former school.

### Site Selection and Participants

#### *Access*

Permission was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as well as the school system before entering the site. A copy of the letter requesting permission to conduct research in the school system is included in Appendix E. Additionally, the researcher contacted the principal of each school that was chosen for the study in addition to the lead counselor in order to gain permission to conduct this research. A copy of the letter to the principal is included in Appendix C. Formal protocol to minimize risk to subjects was followed. Copies of interview questions, permission forms to audiotape, and consent forms were distributed prior to the first visit. The purpose of the study was stated prior to the initial visit.

### *Steps to Acquire Participants/Sample Size*

The researcher contacted potential participants after initial permission was granted by the principal and lead counselor of each site. Contact letters are included in Appendix D. The principal and lead counselor were gatekeepers or those that have an “insider” status at the sites (Creswell, 2005). Participants were selected using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was used to select individuals that purposefully deepen the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Individuals that participated in a phenomenological study were selected using criterion sampling, which means they met the same criteria and have witnessed or utilized school counselor advocacy (Creswell, 2007). All of the participants included in this study had the opportunity to practice or they had knowledge of school counselor advocacy. A formal letter was sent to all participants at each site explaining the study and asking for their participation along with an informed consent form. With the initial letter, the researcher included sample interview questions so that participants could make an informed decision about their participation. The initial letter was followed up with email and phone contacts with all participants. All of these correspondences are included in the Appendices.

### *Population and Number of Participants*

The state of the study was in the southeastern United States. The participants were drawn from a moderately sized school district. The district consisted of urban, suburban, and rural schools. The district had over 53,000 students and 88 schools. Thirteen of these schools were high schools. Within the district, approximately 56% of the students were either African-American or Latino and approximately 52% of the students were economically disadvantaged. Within the district, 54% of all graduating seniors in 2006 planned to attend a

four-year college or university. When these statistics were disaggregated by race, 57% of African-American students and 51% of White students planned to attend a four-year college or university. These statistics were higher than the state figures, which stated that 48% of all students, 48% of African-American students, and 49% of White students planned to attend a four-year college or university following high school graduation. Both the district and the state have smaller college access gaps than the country as a whole, and in the district African American students attended four-year colleges at a higher rate than their White peers.

This study drew participants from three schools. By drawing participants from three sites, differential perspectives could be examined. In addition, the issue of context and its effect on school counselor advocacy was addressed. Context can be defined as differences in type of school (for example, student achievement is either high or low) and differences in school faculty that either support or inhibit advocacy. Common advocacy behaviors amongst school counselors within the same school and between the three schools were identified.

The site selection was purposeful as well as convenient and allowed the researcher to select three schools that served a wide range of students that were traditionally underrepresented in college. The researcher first used data to purposefully select three high schools which were very different although all serve a diverse student population. The site selection was convenient because the researcher was previously employed in this district and has maintained professional contacts. The first high school, Adams High School, was urban in setting and served 1300 students. Approximately 88% of the student body was African-American or Latino and over 50% were economically disadvantaged. The school was designated as a priority school by the state of the study, according to data from the 2006-07 school year. This designation was defined as 50-60% of a school's students were scoring at

grade level. However, the school did meet high growth as defined by the state but did not meet adequate yearly progress as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act. The overall SAT average for the graduating class was 863 and the participation rate was 57%.

The second high school, Branson High School, was suburban in setting and served over 1700 students. Approximately 49% of the student body was African-American or Latino and approximately 25% were economically disadvantaged. The school was designated as a school of distinction by the state, according to data from the 2006-07 school year. This designation was defined as 80-90% of a school's students are scoring at grade level. The school achieved high growth but did not meet adequate yearly progress. The overall SAT average for the graduating class was 996 and the participation rate was 59%.

The final high school, Central High School, was also suburban and served over 1700 students. Approximately 79% of the student body was African-American or Latino and approximately 39% were economically disadvantaged. The school was also designated as a priority school and met expected growth. The school did not meet annual yearly progress. The average SAT for the graduating class was 923 and the participation rate was 46%.

Polkinghorne (1989) recommends a sample size of five to 25 for phenomenological research in order to adequately explore the central phenomenon. The sample size for this study was 19. Adams High School was served by five full-time school counselors. Branson High School was served by five full-time and two part-time school counselors. Central High School was served by six full-time school counselors. All 18 school counselors were asked to participate in this study, and 12 chose to participate. In addition, two principals chose to participate and one declined. An assistant principal at the third school agreed to participate in the principal's place. The principal was asked to participate because administrators may

shape a school counselor's role and responsibilities (Perusse et al., 2004). Finally, teacher input through interviews with four mathematics teachers was included in the study.

Mathematics teachers were chosen purposefully because mathematics achievement and course completion are strongly connected to college access and completion (Horn et al., 2000; Trusty & Niles, 2003). In addition, teachers often function as advocates and may have unique perspectives concerning this topic (Sutton, 1998). Demographic data such as age, race, gender, and years of experience were collected from all of the participants. Table 3.1 presents the reader with an overview of the demographic data of the participants.

#### *Rationale for Choice of Participants*

This district was selected due to the large number of students that are traditionally underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities. The district was one of the largest in the state and had the highest number of students in poverty of the large districts. The three high schools were selected due to their similarities as well as their differences. The three high schools served the same district as well as a diverse student body.

The differences between the high schools included their settings, one urban and two suburban, as well as the overall achievement levels of their students. The urban high school had received recent attention for its status as a low-performing high school and was required by the state to adopt a national reform model for the 2007-08 school year. Bemak (2005) calls for advocacy specifically in urban schools due to the high numbers of students that are living in poverty.

This district had a wide range of achievement levels between its high schools, with several being low-performing and several schools designated as high-performing.

Table 3.1: Participant Overview

Name	Age	Race	Position	School	Years in Education
Amy	32	White	School Counselor	Adams	7
Ashley	40	African-American	School Counselor	Adams	12
Angela	57	White	School Counselor	Adams	25
Anne	38	African-American	School Counselor	Adams	6
Amber	43	White	School Counselor	Adams	8
Ava	32	African-American	Assistant Principal	Adams	9
Andy	29	White	Teacher	Adams	4
Andrea	26	White	Teacher	Adams	3
Bob	35	White	School Counselor	Branson	8
Barbara	51	White	School Counselor	Branson	20
Bill	55	White	School Counselor	Branson	15
Brie	46	Hispanic	School Counselor	Branson	15
Blake	55	Hispanic	Principal	Branson	30
Brock	28	Asian	Teacher	Branson	5
Chelsea	41	White	School Counselor	Central	14
Charles	62	White	School Counselor	Central	37
Clara	56	White	School Counselor	Central	21
Corey	53	White	Principal	Central	25
Courtney	52	African-American	Teacher	Central	30

While this study was not specifically about low versus high-performing schools, these criteria were used to purposefully sample because a difference in the achievement level of a school may impact school counseling behaviors including advocacy (Fitch & Marshall, 2004). In addition, higher achievement levels of students may indicate greater college-going rates. The researcher examined whether context impacts the use of advocacy and therefore selected three

schools that have very distinct differences but also share similarities. The twelve counselors, along with their principals, and teaching staff added richness of perspective to this complex topic.

### Pilot Study

This researcher conducted a pilot study in a small, urban high school in another county in the same state. At the time of the study, the school had a population of approximately 900 students. Approximately 77% of the students at this school were African-American or Latino and approximately 68% were economically disadvantaged. This school was classified as a priority school, according to data from the 2005-06 school year. The school did meet expected growth but did not meet adequate yearly progress. The school was chosen for the pilot study due to the high number of students traditionally underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities.

Interviews and observations were conducted with school counselors, administrators, and teachers. Interview questions were guided by the three research questions which address advocacy definition, advocacy behaviors, and advocacy factors. In addition, the advocacy competencies, literature, and added insights gained from the observation process shaped the interview questions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two school counselors, one assistant principal, and two teachers. A data review was also conducted analyzing college preparatory documents and course registration materials that related to enrollment in rigorous college preparatory coursework.

The data from the interviews, data review and observations were coded and analyzed based on the research questions, conceptual framework, and the literature. Five themes

emerged as a result of this study: (1) Definition of Advocacy, (2) Advocacy dispositions, (3) Communication, (4) Collaboration, and (5) Systemic Barriers to Advocacy. Findings from this pilot study were closely aligned with results from previous studies on school counselor advocacy (Field, 2002; Perusse & Goodnough, 2001; Perusse et al., 2004) as well as the conceptual framework by Brown and Trusty (2005). The participants all held different definitions of advocacy within this context and believed a disposition for advocacy was essential. In addition, they believed communication and collaboration were essential for successful advocacy. Finally, they believed that many of the barriers to their advocacy efforts were based in the students, family, and community. The pilot study was not replicated. It was expanded to include two schools similar in demographics to the pilot school and another school that had dissimilar demographics to more fully address the issue of context in defining advocacy. Findings from this pilot study were used to guide interview and research questions for this research study. Research question three was added to address contextual issues not addressed by Brown and Trusty (2005) and interview questions were added to more specifically address advocacy knowledge found in the conceptual framework. Advocacy knowledge was not found to be relevant to the school counselors or school faculty in the pilot study so this issue was further addressed as a part of the current research study.

### Research Questions

As stated in Chapter One, the following research questions were used to guide this study: (a) How do high school counselors and faculty define school counselor advocacy within the context of increasing college access for underrepresented students? (b) How do high school counselors advocate for underrepresented students? and (c) How do high school

counselors and faculty describe personal and environmental factors that impact school counselor advocacy within this context? The research questions enabled the researcher to analyze the data by providing a textural and a structural description of the participants' experiences. Transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) focuses on "what" and "how" questions in order to gather data that provides a general and comprehensive understanding of the experiences of all the participants.

The interview questions were guided by the research questions as well as the advocacy competencies and the literature. Table 3.2 presents the reader with the connection between the interview questions, research questions, and the advocacy competencies. Tables later in the chapter will provide additional detail concerning the relationship between the interview questions, research questions, and advocacy competencies.

## Qualitative Data Collection Methods

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

The researcher used semi-structured interviews to gain the perspectives of the school counselors, principals, and teachers at the two high schools. Interviews were the primary data collection strategy. Interviews are often the primary means of data collection in a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2007). "Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (Patton, 2002, p.341). A semi-structured interview uses an interview guide that is driven by the research questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Table 3.2: Interview Questions and Correspondence to Research Questions, and Advocacy Competencies

Interview Questions	Research Questions	Advocacy Competencies
1a	Question a, b, & c	Dispositions, Knowledge, Skills
2a	Question a, b, & c	Dispositions, Knowledge, Skills
3a	Question c	Dispositions
4a	Question c	Dispositions
5a		Dispositions
6a	Question c	Dispositions, Knowledge
7a	Question c	Dispositions, Knowledge
8a	Question c	Dispositions, Knowledge
9a		Knowledge
10a	Question b	Skills
11a	Question b	Skills
12a	Question a	Skills
1b	Question a, b, & c	Dispositions, Knowledge, Skills
2b	Question a, b, & c	Dispositions, Knowledge, Skills
3b	Question c	Dispositions
4b		Dispositions
5b	Question c	Dispositions, Knowledge
6b	Question c	Dispositions, Knowledge
7b	Question c	Dispositions, Knowledge
8b	Question b	Knowledge, Skills
9b	Question b	Skills
10b	Question a	Skills

Table 3.3 presents the reader with the research questions along with the correlated interview questions.

Table 3.3: Research Questions and Correspondence to Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
(a) How do high school counselors and faculty define school counselor advocacy within the context of increasing college access for underrepresented students?	1a, 2a, 12a, 1b, 2b, 10b
(b) How do high school counselors advocate for underrepresented students in terms of college access?	1a, 2a, 10a, 11a, 1b, 2b, 8b, 9b,
(c) How do high school counselors and faculty describe personal and environmental factors that impact school counselor advocacy in terms of college access?	1a, 2a, 3a, 4a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 1b, 2b, 3b, 5b, 6b, 7b

An interview guide ensures that each participant is subject to the same line of inquiry (Patton, 2002). The questions were structured to allow the participants to create their own options for responding and not feel constrained by the perspective of the researcher (Creswell, 2005). Probes were used to deepen the responses of participants, add more detailed information, as well as cue the researcher to continue the line of inquiry (Patton, 2002). Interviews are advantageous because they allow the participant to provide a more detailed perspective and for the researcher to guide the focus of the study. The negative aspect of interviews is that the perspectives gained are filtered through views of a few participants (Creswell, 2005).

The research questions as well as the advocacy competencies by Brown and Trusty (2005) guided the interview questions. As stated in Chapter Two, the conceptual framework highlights essential dispositions, knowledge, and skills required for effective school counselor

advocacy. The three domains were primarily used to guide the interview questions. The sub-domains were not used in the interview questions. Table 3.4 highlights the correlation between Brown and Trusty's advocacy competencies and the interview questions.

In addition, literature guided the interview questions. In particular, successful strategies to improve college access for underrepresented students are represented in one of the interview questions. Table 3.5 highlights the relationship between the research and the interview questions.

School counselors were asked a total of 13 questions. The researcher was interested in how each school counselor personally defined advocacy within the context of the study. In addition, school counselors were asked to identify advocacy behaviors that they use and factors that impact school counselor advocacy. The administrators and teachers were asked a total of 11 questions. The researcher was interested in how administrators and teachers defined as well as valued school counselor advocacy within this context. Administrators and teachers also provided context to the practice of school counselor advocacy. Interview questions are included in the Appendix A and B.

### Data Analysis

Qualitative research analysis is an ongoing process that involves continual reexamination of the data throughout the study. "Data analysis is not viewed as the final stage of qualitative research but as part of a rotating cycle, which can offer spaces for collecting new and better data and can lead to preliminary reports and interpretations" (Yeh & Inman, 2007, p.385). Data was continually coded and grouped as additional themes were identified.

Table 3.4: Advocacy Competencies and the Relation to Interview Questions

Advocacy Competencies	Questions	Interview Questions
Dispositions	How does a school counselor's disposition towards advocacy impact their use of advocacy?	1a, 2a, 3a, 4a, 5a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 1b, 2b, 3b, 4b, 5b, 6b, 7b
Knowledge	How does a school counselor's advocacy knowledge impact their use of advocacy? Does a lack of knowledge lessen the use of advocacy?	1a, 2a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 9a, 1b, 2b, 5b, 6b, 7b, 8b
Skills	Are skills such as communication, collaboration, problem-assessment, problem-solving, organizational, and self-care essential for the use of advocacy by school counselors?	1a, 2a, 10a, 11a, 12a, 1b, 2b, 8b, 9b, 10b

Table 3.5: Successful Strategies to Improve College Access and the Relation to the Interview Questions

Successful Strategies	Questions	Interview Questions
School Variables	How do school counselors use data to advocate for change within the school culture?	11aIV, 11aV, 9bIV, 9bV
Parental Involvement	How do school counselors work to educate parents and students on how to advocate for themselves while becoming more involved?	11aIII, 9bIII
Enrollment in rigorous coursework	How do school counselors advocate for changes within the school that will allow more underrepresented students to enroll in rigorous coursework?	11aI, 11aII, 9bI, 9bII

After data was collected, a preliminary coding scheme was developed based upon the research questions, advocacy competencies, and the literature. Theoretical perspectives as well as the researcher's values impacted what codes were used (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). An initial analysis of the data was conducted to create codes. Initial codes were words, phrases, or ideas that stood out after an initial review of the data. The data was read and all codes that were

relevant to the research questions, advocacy competencies, literature, as well as emergent codes were noted. However, the advocacy competencies primarily determined the initial codes that were used. The researcher analyzed the data to determine if school counselors possessed essential advocacy dispositions, knowledge, and skills. In addition, the researcher identified which advocacy competencies were not being utilized by school counselors. This master list of codes was used to analyze all data. Coding analysis, or the development of relevant codes, is the way in which the researcher reduced the amount of data in order to look for themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A secondary analysis was conducted to develop larger themes or clusters of meaning (Moustakas, 1994) within the data. Similar codes were grouped together to develop these clusters of meaning. A final analysis enabled the researcher to detect emergent themes within the data. These emergent themes were advocacy behaviors by school counselors that did not fit within the conceptual framework. Qualitative research software, Atlas.ti, was used to aid in this analysis by coding all data and grouping these data into themes.

The researcher was looking for common experiences or ideas among the school counselors and faculty. These themes were then used to provide a textural and structural description of the participant's experience. After the data was coded and analyzed for themes, it was compared amongst participants at the same school and then between the three schools. Finally, the researcher completed the data analysis by writing a final description that provided the "essence of the phenomenon under study" (Moustakas, 1994).

### *Establishing Trustworthiness*

The researcher acknowledged her status as an insider to the phenomenon, or school counselor advocacy, being studied. The researcher took additional steps to ensure the data represented the perspectives of the participants and not the researcher. In order to establish trustworthiness within this study, this researcher conducted member checks following each interview to verify the accuracy of the data. Participants were asked to verify the accuracy of their statements. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. This researcher also made use of a peer debriefing. Peer debriefing occurred after each visit to the field (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

In addition, the researcher made use of field notes and a self-reflective journal. Field notes and the self-reflective journal were written and reviewed after each interview. The field notes and journal assisted the researcher in personal self-reflection and the bracketing of assumptions and judgments about school counselor advocacy (Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). Finally, the use of a variety of data collection techniques (i.e. interviews, field notes, and the self-reflective journal) enhanced the trustworthiness of this study by providing data from several sources and frames of reference (Denzin, 1978).

### Limitations of the Study

The researcher believes that context has an impact on the use of school counselor advocacy so this phenomenon may appear differently in different situations or school settings. The study of advocacy within this particular context is very narrow, so therefore school counselors that advocate within different contexts may define advocacy differently. However, context in this study, while important, had less influence than anticipated. There

was limited variance amongst different participants and schools despite distinct contextual differences. This limitation may be attributed to the narrow focus of this study and the focus of the interview questions. Subjects that chose to participate were particularly interested in this topic or felt they were knowledgeable about this subject and may therefore have skewed the results. Finally, the researcher acknowledges personal biases and an insider status with the participants being studied.

## CHAPTER IV DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of qualitative data analysis is to sort and define the data while providing a thick description. Within this chapter, the data were sorted in to three, interrelated topics that address the research questions. The first question defines advocacy within the context of increasing college access for underrepresented students. The second question describes advocacy behaviors of school counselors. Finally, the third question describes personal and environmental factors that impact the use of advocacy. All of the research questions were divided further by utilizing the Advocacy Competencies for Professional School Counselors (Brown & Trusty, 2005), and its three domains, dispositions, knowledge, and skills.

The first section, advocacy definition, addresses advocacy dispositions and includes the sub-topics empathy, a parental role, and an ethical disposition. The second section, advocacy behaviors, addresses advocacy dispositions and skills and includes sub-topics on two-year colleges, communication, collaboration, problem assessment, family support and systemic change. The third section, advocacy factors, addresses advocacy dispositions and context and its impact on advocacy. Context is not addressed by the conceptual framework and these data from this study suggest context is relevant to school counselor advocacy. Sub-topics that are described in the final section are school counselor background, school counselor complacency, student ability, family barriers, role confusion, district and state barriers, and administrative and teacher perspectives. Finally, while interview questions were structured around essential advocacy knowledge, none of the participants emphasized the importance of this competency. Rather, the participants emphasized a disposition for advocacy along with advocacy skills. While a presumption could be made that advocacy

knowledge would be essential to advocacy skills, these participants did not emphasize knowledge. The lack of advocacy knowledge will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter V. Table 4.1 provides an organizational chart of Chapter IV.

Chapter IV begins with a detailed description of the participants to enhance an understanding of the findings. The participants' personal background and values impacted their definition of advocacy as well as their description of advocacy behaviors. To increase clarity; participants from Adams High School will have names that begin with "A", participants from Branson High School have names that begin with "B", and participants from Central High School begin with "C".

#### Participant Profiles

##### *Amy*

Amy is a White school counselor in her thirties who has worked at Adams High School for four years. She has served as the chairperson of the department for the past three. Before working at this school, she was at a prominent, high-performing high school in another southern state for two years. In addition, she also worked as a college admissions counselor, which gives her an inside perspective when working with underrepresented students to improve college access. Amy is very outspoken and works very closely with the school administration on school-wide issues. She is very comfortable with data and sees the need for school counselors to advocate for systemic change. This perspective is shaped through her work experience in two very different high schools. She is also very sure of herself and her role as a school counselor.

Table 4.1: Organizational Chart of Chapter IV

Research Questions	Advocacy Definition	Advocacy Behaviors	Advocacy Factors
Conceptual Framework			
Dispositions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Parental Role</li> <li>• Ethical Disposition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two-year Colleges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School Counselor Background</li> <li>• School Counselor Complacency</li> </ul>
Knowledge			
Skills		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Use of Data</li> <li>• Family Empowerment</li> <li>• Systemic Change</li> </ul>	
Context			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Ability</li> <li>• Family Barriers</li> <li>• Role Confusion</li> <li>• District and State Barriers</li> </ul>

*Ashley*

Ashley is an African-American school counselor in her forties who has also worked at Adams High School for four years. Before coming to work at Adams High School, she worked as a transition counselor for the military and Educational Talent Search for eight years.

Educational Talent Search is a government funded college preparation program for students that are traditionally underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities. Ashley is also the AVID counselor at Adams High School. Ashley has extensive career experience working with underrepresented students and feels very strongly about this role. However, she is more tentative in describing her role as a school counselor and how she fits in to the rest of the educational community. This may be due to her graduate training, which was in college counseling and not school counseling. Ashley had not received any graduate training to work in high schools prior to taking the counseling position at Adams.

*Angela*

Angela is a White school counselor in her fifties. This is her first year at Adams high school. However, she has worked as a school counselor for 21 years, and also served as a teacher for four years at the beginning of her career. Angela has worked at a variety of different schools throughout her career but did not draw parallels between those experiences and her current position. She was very articulate and very sure about herself and her role. She is clearly devoted to her students; however, she is not as passionate about advocacy as some of her younger colleagues.

*Anne*

Anne is an African-American school counselor in her thirties. She has worked at Adams High School for three years and worked as a school counselor at another high school in the south for three additional years. She drew upon her personal experiences frequently to explain the need for advocacy. She also had difficulty defining advocacy and her role as a school counselor in the educational community.

*Amber*

Amber is a White school counselor in her forties. She has worked at Adams High School for two years and as a school counselor for four years. Before working as a school counselor, she worked as a substitute teacher for four years. Amber is very outspoken and opinionated. She also is driven by her personal background and had difficulty articulating her role. She was very interested in the research topic and was very talkative, although she sometimes had difficulty defining and describing advocacy within the context of college access. This could be attributed to her role as the freshman counselor so she does not spend as much time as the other school counselors specifically confronting this issue. Her focus is more on improving academic achievement and keeping younger students focused on school. She also did not have graduate training in high school counseling.

*Ava*

Ava is an African-American Assistant Principal in her thirties. She has worked at Adams High School for nine years. She served as an English teacher for five years, and in her current position for four. She has a unique perspective concerning Adams High School because she

attended the school, and has lived in this community her entire life. She also supervises the school counselors so she works with them day-to-day and is able to observe their advocacy behaviors.

### *Andy*

Andy is a White mathematics teacher in his twenties. He has worked as a mathematics teacher at Adams High School for three years, and spent one additional year as a teacher in the Midwest. He exclusively teaches Geometry, which is relevant because this is the first math in the college preparatory math sequence. He works frequently with the school counselors and spends much of his time with them socially. Due to his friendship with the school counselors, he is able to get to know them and better understand their role.

### *Andrea*

Andrea is a White mathematics teacher in her twenties. She has worked at Adams High School for three years, and has no other prior experience. She is also from the Midwest and teaches Geometry. Andrea serves as the mathematics department chair.

### *Bob*

Bob is a White school counselor in his thirties. He has worked at Branson High School for four years. He worked as a substitute teacher for four years before becoming a school counselor. Bob was very thoughtful in his answers throughout the interview. In fact, he is the only participant who prepared by reviewing the questions before the interview. He is very data driven, and enjoyed using data to inform his counseling practices.

*Barbara*

Barbara is a White school counselor in her fifties. She has served as a school counselor at Branson High School for several years, and has worked as a school counselor for approximately twenty years. She has worked in a variety of schools, including Adams High School before coming to Branson. She is very experienced and enjoyed discussing her role and advocacy. She is very secure in her position and in her role within the school. She was able to clearly articulate the role advocacy plays in college access.

*Bill*

Bill is a White school counselor in his fifties. He has worked at Branson High School for four years, and has worked as a school counselor for ten years. In addition, he worked in Mental Health for five years before becoming a school counselor. He also serves as the Secondary Lead Counselor for the district. Like Bob, Bill is very data driven and enjoys working with computer programs and numbers to make his job easier. He also worked at Adams High School early in his career. Like the other school counselors at Branson, he is very comfortable in his role within the school and emphasized the importance of advocacy.

*Brie*

Brie is a Hispanic school counselor in her forties. She has only been a school counselor for two years. She was hired before finishing her masters' degree. Before becoming a school counselor, she worked as a Business teacher for thirteen years and has worked at Branson High School since it opened. She is well connected and respected amongst the faculty. As a new school counselor, she admits that she is still learning about her role as well as all the

resources available to students as they pursue college. She is extremely pleased with the counseling department as a whole and stressed that the veteran school counselors on staff were excellent mentors and were leading by example as to how to be a better advocate.

### *Blake*

Blake is a Hispanic principal in his fifties. He has served as a principal for twelve years, and has been the only principal at Branson High School. He also worked as an assistant principal for five years, and as a mathematics teacher for thirteen years. Blake is extremely opinionated as to how a high school should be managed and operated. He also has very strong views as to the separation of roles between administrators and school counselors. Blake has experienced success as the principal of Branson High School, because it is the highest performing school in the district and has one of the smallest achievement gaps in the state.

### *Brock*

Brock is an Asian mathematics teacher in his twenties. This is his fourth year as a mathematics teacher at Branson High School and he has worked as a teacher for five years. Like the mathematics teachers from Adams High School, he was also recruited from the Midwest. He teaches Technical Math, which is significant because he teaches students on the College Tech Prep course of study. The College Tech Prep course will prepare students for a two-year college instead of a four-year college. His perspective is interesting because he works with students that often have lower mathematics ability but he still sees the promise that they can pursue some type of post-secondary education.

*Chelsea*

Chelsea is a White school counselor in her forties. She has worked at Central High School as a school counselor for eleven years. Before beginning her career as a school counselor, she served in the military, worked in college admissions for one year, and worked in Social Services for two years. She serves as the counseling department chair at Central High School. She is very passionate about the importance of advocacy; however she was very cautious in her responses. She is very secure in her role, and while she works hand-in-hand with administration, she sometimes felt that school counselors had to advocate quietly to effectively increase college access for students.

*Charles*

Charles is a White school counselor in his sixties. He has worked at Central High School as a school counselor for five years. Before becoming a school counselor, he worked in county Mental Health for ten years; and in Mental Health in the military for twenty-two years. Charles is very opinionated and strongly believes that advocacy is most needed with families, because students begin high school unprepared for the rigorous, college preparatory coursework. He felt advocacy is not needed specifically for underrepresented populations if they are meeting minimum requirements for college because colleges often admitted many of these students. He was not able to articulate whether underrepresented students were less likely to complete college requirements than their peers, thereby making them less likely to attend college. He does not see this gap in Central High School.

*Clara*

Clara is a White school counselor in her fifties. She has worked as a school counselor for twenty-one years. Central High School is her first experience as a high school counselor. She has previously served as an elementary and middle school counselor. Currently, she works as the ninth grade counselor and has less day-to-day interactions with students that are dealing with college access issues. Clara values advocacy, and the role it played in college access. However, she is still negotiating her role as a high school counselor and her lack of direct contact with college-bound seniors makes it more difficult for her to articulate the connection between advocacy and college access.

*Corey*

Corey is a White principal in his fifties. This is his first-year at Central High School, although he has 12 years experience as a principal, mostly at the high school level. Before becoming a principal, he worked as an assistant principal for eight years and as a science and physical education teacher for five years. As a first-year principal, he is setting expectations for the staff including the school counselors. He cared very passionately about this topic, and was the most enthusiastic principal in the study. He believes the school counselors should be doing more for students to help them obtain access to college. He does not see Central High School counselors frequently advocating for underrepresented students and their families.

*Courtney*

Courtney is an African-American mathematics teacher in her sixties. She has spent her entire career at Central High School and currently teaches Algebra I. She is a unique mathematics

teacher in the study because she teaches a course all students must take to graduate. All students in the state of the study must pass Algebra I in order to graduate high school. She also advises students as to whether they should take Geometry or Technical Math after Algebra I. This decision will impact whether a student will be prepared to enter a four-year college.

### Administrative and Teacher Perspectives

The rationale for incorporating administrators and teachers in this study was to gain additional perspectives about school counselor advocacy and to better understand others' expectations of school counselors. As previously discussed in Chapter II, these expectations may define school counselor advocacy for the school counselors. While administrative and teacher perspectives are integrated throughout all sections, it was felt a separate section was needed initially to condense their reflections on the use of advocacy in their schools. Ava provided an interesting perspective on the school counselors at Adams High School, having worked at the school for eight years, first as a teacher, and currently as the Assistant Principal who supervises the school counselors. Ava works very closely with the school counselors and values their input. However, she does not see them use data to advocate for students and she does not observe them challenge students to take higher level courses.

I'm not going to say they don't do it, challenging students to take higher-level courses, I just don't see it. Unfortunately, I see us kind of tracking and if you're low level you stay low level. We don't really push it. Every now and then I do see an exception but not often.

In addition, one area she felt the school counselors could improve was to make more personal calls to college recruiters to advocate for students. Andy, a mathematics teacher at Adams, felt the school counselors could do a better job of reaching out to students at a younger age in

the ninth grade. He felt there was too much focus on juniors and seniors and for many students that was too late.

Corey, the principal at Central High School, also had a unique perspective because it was his first year at the school, although he had many years experience as a high school principal. He said he was working with the school counselors to get to know them and let them know his expectations.

I talked to them about the academic core, about challenging our students, about making sure our students are taking the right courses in sequence to make sure their academic record is as high as possible...In the past they (school counselors) just haven't been challenged to push students to that level. They were challenged to get students off and away and to graduate students. There is a difference between graduating students and students being successful and going to college. We've done a good job of graduating students here, so we have to change that mindset.

He also expressed a need to contact college admissions recruiters personally to advocate on behalf of individual students as well as more education for students and families about college admission requirements.

Brock, a mathematics teacher at Branson High School voiced his support for the school counselors.

I don't see anything our counselors could do better in regards to advocacy. We have great counselors; it's hard to see anything negative. They're always supportive and talk to the students. They even do home visits when necessary. They fit into the mission of the school. Our goal at Branson High School is to make sure they're (students) are successful in life.

In general, Blake, the principal at Branson High School agreed and was very satisfied with his school counselors and the college access services they were providing the students.

## Advocacy Definition

The first section deals with the participants' personal definition of advocacy, and discusses the sub-topics that are related to their definition. When asked how they defined advocacy in general terms, many of the school counselors and other school personnel consistently emphasized the need for empathy and a genuine caring for the well-being of their students. Also, many of the participants defined the role of advocate as a parental role. Additionally, a school counselor's personal code of ethics was vital to the definition of school counselor advocacy within this context. While defining advocacy, the participants emphasized the disposition of the school counselors rather than knowledge and skills that are essential to advocacy.

### *Dispositions*

#### *Empathy*

When asked to describe advocacy generally, the first word used by many of the participants was empathy. Over half of the participants, which included school counselors, administrators, and teachers, stressed that successful school counselor advocates must have empathy for students as well as a genuine sense of caring about their well-being. Anne felt school counselors needed to care about students' future plans after high school, which may include college. Barbara said:

I've even had an administrator say to me, you're a good counselor but you're too softhearted. Meaning that by softhearted, I'm going to go to bat for my student that needs the opportunity...Being the bleeding heart, which they think they're giving you the ultimate insult and I go thank you.

The school counselors in this study felt they had to fulfill this expectation, and be the one who cares for students because other educators may have to be a little tougher.

In addition, other school counselors stated that empathy and care was essential to being a good counselor. Clara described this empathy and care as a “light” and said “if you don’t have that, you’re not going to be an effective counselor.” Courtney, a mathematics teacher at Central High School said:

I think the counselors have got to genuinely care for our students. They’ve got to believe that our kids have got to be successful. They also have to believe that higher education is important and each student should be encouraged to pursue what is best for them. I think counselors need to be nurturing.

According to Barbara, empathy for parents was equally important.

We have to have empathy for parents, because if we can have good rapport with the parent who has not had a good background and if we can develop trust with them then they are going to communicate with their children to go see this person. And they're going to make that a value to that student.

Empathy for underrepresented students and their families was perceived as the essential element for effective advocacy to increase college access.

### *Parental Role*

In addition to empathy, over half of the participants described advocacy as taking a parental role with the student. Participants stated that school counselors need to take this role because many of the students lacked a parental advocate. Either their parent was simply uninvolved or they did not understand the process of college admissions and therefore could not effectively advocate for their child. As an administrator, Corey carried the expectation that his school counselors had to be great parents to the students, because many of the students did not have the parent that they needed. Ashley agreed and said as advocates, “you become the auntie, the big sister, and the mom for that student.” Additionally, Angela felt

that many students had a void where their parent should be, and the school counselor and the classroom teacher were capable of filling that space.

Other participants felt that the purpose of the parental role was not only to fill a void but a high standard as to how students should be treated. Students deserved the highest level of care and Barbara defined advocacy as “treating the child across from you as if they were your own.” Additionally, Bill stated that, “one thing I try to do is treat every child like I would want my child to be treated. Most parents appreciate that, and not as if they're my own but how I would want mine to be treated.”

### *Ethical Disposition*

The school counselors emphasized the importance of their ethical disposition towards advocacy. Their personal code of ethics and their sense of commitment to their students drove their use and personal definition of advocacy. Half of the school counselors believed they had an ethical responsibility to all students, and no one group of students deserved special treatment. As it pertains to this study, they did not feel that school counselors should advocate more for students that were underrepresented in four year colleges and universities. Advocacy for college access was a counseling function that all students should benefit from, regardless of their personal circumstances. Angela expressed this belief by saying there should not “be differences in the way you counsel students”, and Anne said,

I don't think advocacy is different unless you're going to focus on a specific group of kids. Since you really can't single out a category, that population, really it's not. You should be doing that (advocacy) for all of your children, so unless you can or are allowed to single out that population of kids then it is no different.

Anne expressed that she deeply understood this group of students had more pronounced needs than others, but she did not feel it was ethical to give them special treatment.

These school counselors believe advocacy is a part of the traditional role of a school counselor and they had an ethical responsibility to advocate for all students. Clara said advocacy was “synonymous with being a good counselor” and Chelsea agreed saying “if you’re not advocating, then you’re just not a good counselor.” Additionally, Bill asked “how can you be a counselor and not be an advocate?” Professional school counselors operate by a code of ethics and these school counselors felt their professional ethics mandated they advocate for all students and without this advocacy they would not be effective.

In contrast, Charles did not see a need for advocacy to increase college access for underrepresented students.

School counselors have not had that much difficulty getting the students that have the qualifications in to the colleges. Colleges have been very good about that regardless of race or economic status. The problem where I found it needs advocacy more is not at the high school level but before the high school. The financial or the economic status of a family leaves a child less prepared...Most of these kids start out as (high school) freshman as college prep, and when they graduate I spend all my time crossing that out and putting college tech prep and career prep. Many of these colleges take most of the students that apply, and we don’t have to do a great deal of advocating...Often times we’re confronted by the do well enough attitude, and not to excel. I can advocate all day long, but I’m not going to be able to come up with any money for the senior with the low GPA.

He seemed to place the responsibility for college access primarily on the students and their families. Unlike the other school counselors, he did not stress the importance of advocacy for college access as a counseling function and like other school counselors did equate advocacy as part of the traditional role of the school counselor.

The belief that advocacy is essential to counseling contrasts with the belief that advocacy is somehow different from traditional counseling. The other half of the school counselors did believe advocacy used a different set of communication skills than traditional

counseling, and in order to be an effective advocate and challenge student obstacles one needed to go above and beyond normal expectations. Bob stated that,

I think advocacy is different because it is not something you would do just one-on-one. I think advocacy you are using a different skill set, you are not simply listening and reflecting. You are a lot more active, not saying traditional counseling skills are not a part of advocacy. There is only so much of well how do you feel about the SAT, and then what? I think it's a little more active, and probably a little more collaborative.

The school counselors in the study were split as to whether advocacy skills were different from or the same as skills needed in traditional counseling. While an ethical disposition and a devotion to all students is important, effective advocacy for college access entails identifying students that are not being prepared to enter a four-year college. Many of these students rely more heavily on the school counselor because they are the first in their family to go to college.

### *Summary*

Almost universally, the school counselors, administrators, and teachers in this study define school counselor advocacy as the use of empathy and the assumption of a parental role. Their code of ethics is also essential to their definition of school counselor advocacy. The participants believe there are barriers to college access for underrepresented students and with the use of empathy, care, a parental role, and ethics, they can turn a disposition towards advocacy into action and incorporate advocacy into their day-to-day roles and responsibilities. In addition to verbally defining school counselor advocacy within this context, participants also defined school counselor advocacy by highlighting advocacy behaviors in their own schools.

### Advocacy Behaviors

The definition of school counselor advocacy within the context of college access is also shaped by how school counselors advocate daily for students and families. School counselors utilized two-year colleges as an avenue to the four-year college for their students. Within the context of increasing college access for underrepresented students, school counselors in this study use communication and collaboration skills to more effectively advocate for students. They use these communication and collaboration skills to build relationships with students, families, school personnel, and the community. The participants did stress the need for school counselors to utilize resources available for students that will increase college access. They also utilize these resources to support the families in their goal of having their children attend a college or university. In addition, some of the participants did use data and address systemic change in their educational system.

### *Disposition*

When describing advocacy behaviors of school counselors within this context, participants displayed a disposition towards advising students to enroll in a two-year college as an avenue to enrollment in a four-year college. These school counselors understand this potentially valuable resource. Despite the focus of this research study on access to four-year colleges and universities, over half of the research participants emphasized two-year colleges as an appropriate option for some students. The participants mentioned this option without being prompted. This option was primarily mentioned in the context of enrolling in the college transfer program at community colleges and using the Associates' degree to transfer to a four-year college or university. Angela said the community college had often been

looked down upon, but she believes this perception is beginning to change. Bob said many students were not mature enough to attend a four-year college immediately after high school and “a significant number (of students) would be better served to go to community college for one or two years.”

In addition, many students may not be academically prepared to enter a four-year college, so Chelsea said they try to tell students about the opportunity to start at a community college and transfer to a four-year college. Economics and the reduced cost of tuition at a community college were also cited as a factor. Bill stated that,

We have some kids on the poverty level and they need extra money and we have some who need scholarships but they're not a qualified for scholarships and for those they may have to go to a community college and transfer to the University.

Several of the teachers in the study also agreed that community college was a legitimate option for their students. Brock’s endorsement of community college makes sense because he primarily teaches students that do not have the option to attend a four-year college immediately following high school based on their math placement. “It’s important for students to take the next step after high school and the technical school is a good step for them...A technical degree is better than nothing.” Courtney knowingly expanded college access to include more than four-year colleges and universities.

And I think for our students instead of just saying colleges or universities, perhaps even the community college is a good resource for ours (students) and let them go through the transfer program or something.

There are numerous post-secondary options available for students, and students should be able to choose which option is right for them. Finances for students in poverty should not be a barrier given the financial aid that is now available for these students. Participants in this study did not seem to be aware that students may be less likely to finish college if they begin

at a two-year college. Many did not believe that the study should be limited to only four-year colleges and thought the two-year college was a good option for many students. Due to low retention rates at the two-year college, these participants may be advocating for an option that adds a barrier for their students on the path to attainment of the bachelor's degree.

### *Skills*

#### *Communication*

Four issues were raised when the participants discussed communication skills. Most of the participants emphasized the importance of a one-on-one relationship with students. Bill said, "I think meeting with each student individually is important, it's difficult, but they get to know who you are and they feel comfortable coming to you." Barbara stated that once you get to know a student and their goals, it becomes much easier to advocate for them. From an administrative perspective, Ava said she felt that this one-on-one contact was what was missing from the school counseling program in her school. She felt that communication and patience were essential for effective advocacy. Additionally, Chelsea felt students needed more individual attention from their school counselors in order to meet their goals. While important, the participant's emphasis on one-on-one attention illustrates that most of the participants believe this is integral for advocacy, rather than focusing on all students by emphasizing comprehensive programs and systemic change.

The participants stressed that getting to know the students and forming a relationship is what motivates them. Amy said,

These students are amazing, they have potential and that is what gets me going, seeing them succeed and get to places that they never thought possible, and their families never thought possible.

Courtney, a mathematics teacher at Central High School, felt relationships with students were important for all faculty.

I would say school personnel, and I don't mean just counselors, I mean whole school personnel, should work with maybe small groups of students and it would create this special bond and start with them in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and work with them all through high school.

Second, a few of the participants believed trust was essential for effective advocacy.

Participants felt getting to know the students would enable them to form relationships with students and parents, and to earn their trust. Relationship building and rapport was essential to build trust with students and families. Corey said the school counselor, student relationship has "got to be a very secure relationship, where a student knows they can come in and talk to a counselor and feel safe." Barbara stated that "when kids trust you, and feel like you're advocating for them, you're going to get more business." Forming a relationship with students enabled her to advocate for students in situations when she was needed.

Third, many of the participants stressed the importance of college information and exposure for students. Angela said the school counselors at Adams High School advertise college programs and opportunities as well as taking the students on campus visits and bringing in guest speakers. Bill said school counselors need to make students aware of high school graduation requirements, college admission requirements, and opportunities for scholarships and financial aid. Finally, Brie said she has been able to offer a small counseling group on the skills necessary to become prepared for college.

School counselors also stressed the need to utilize their communication skills to distribute college information. School counselors use this relationship and trust to convey necessary information about college to students and families. Ashley believed providing information about college was the biggest piece of advocacy. She said, "I will bend over

backwards to make sure parents and students know what's going on." Additionally, Angela said she provides information in "written form and technology" for students because they receive so much information you have to present it in multiple formats so that they do not tune it out. Courtney, a mathematics teacher at Central High School, said college information for students was critical to advocacy.

Because our students don't even know what's available. And I think being in our setting, the low SES setting that we are in, our counselors are our spokesperson. They're our source of communication for our students.

Brock, a mathematics teacher, utilized the skills of his school counselors so that he could educate his students. He teaches Technical Math, which is a mathematics course for students that are not completing the admissions requirements for a four-year college or university.

I also work with the school counselors to learn more about the requirements of certain colleges. For example, even if they take the technical math, they can still go to some private colleges and of course community college. I want to make sure I am giving students the correct information.

Despite teaching students that are not on the college preparatory pathway, Brock encouraged his students to further their education after high school.

Virtually all of the participants emphasized the importance of distributing college information. College information is important to be able to prepare for and enter college. However, is this distribution of information a part of advocacy or merely college counseling? College counseling would be an expected role for high school counselors. The participants in this study defined communicating college information as a part of advocacy to increase college access. Despite research (Venezia & Kirst, 2005) indicating that underrepresented students may not receive as much college information as their peers, the participants did not identify this as a problem in their own schools. They did not examine their own policies and

practices of distributing information nor include identifying inequities as part of their advocacy behaviors.

Finally, several of the school counselors shared personal stories of how they use their advocacy skills to impact college access for students. Amy said,

We had a student last year applying to a school that we had never had anyone apply to. It was a student who had good test scores and had the other stuff but at that point when you have a student applying to such an elite school and we haven't had a history on our campus. I felt it was in his best interest for us to make a contact with that school and let them know how important it was for that student and tell them about this student from me personally.

She said that the student was admitted and is attending that institution. Additionally, Barbara said when she builds a relationship with academically strong African-American male students she is extremely honest with them.

With my black male students that I've known for a couple of years, if they are strong I'll look at them and say because you're an underrepresented population if you do well to cover all your bases, such as volunteerism and keeping your grades up, and you're the total package, you can write your ticket. You have a responsibility to yourself to do this. Maybe it isn't politically correct for me to say that, but I know from looking at stats and from all these years of seeing who gets in and who doesn't.

School counselors use these communication skills to collaborate with students, families, the community, and other school personnel.

### *Collaboration*

Many of the participants felt collaboration was important to effectively advocate for students. Amy said,

It's not just a school counselor issue; it's an issue for the entire educational community. We all have to be a part of providing access, and that goes in to providing access to classes and teachers can help. Luckily we have not had teachers that are barriers to getting into AP classes and honors classes. But you know in a lot of schools that are similar to ours, there are. Everybody has to be a part of and share your vision for access to students. And understand that our students do have a higher

risk of not moving on to the higher education level. And our students are not going to seek out higher level classes, so we need to be the advocate for them, and we need everybody to be a piece of that, the teachers, the administrators, the custodians, the cafeteria workers, everybody has got to see that there is a piece of the puzzle for them.

Corey, as a principal, saw the collaboration between teachers and school counselors as a way to discuss and better meet student needs. “We have a lot of work there, as far as the crossover between students, counselors, and teachers, and how we can best make the puzzle work.”

In addition, Angela stressed the importance of the teacher, because teachers see students every day. Adams High School also has an AVID program and the AVID counselor (Ashley) works extensively with teachers and parents to promote college access for AVID students. The school counselors at Branson High School utilize the collaborative skills and connections of Brie because she was a teacher at the school before she became a school counselor.

I'm really lucky because I was on staff here as a teacher, I'll even have counselors come up to me and say can you go talk to so and so. I've been on the staff here since the school opened so there are not many people here that I can't call up and say hey can you help?

Participants at all three high schools work most extensively together during high school registration. Teachers provide recommendations for the courses in which students should enroll based on their ability level. School counselors then collaborate with administration to ensure the courses match students' abilities and goals. Courtney said school counselors are always coming to her for help with mathematics placement. “And I think one thing they are doing this year that I really like is the one-on-one registration with our kids getting them placed in the right classes.” Chelsea said she is fortunate at Central High School because she has not “had much teacher resistance; they mostly support students taking challenging courses.”

This collaborative effort was the most elaborate at Branson High School. Blake is a very hands-on principal, and believes that registration is an administrative task and that school counselors should have minimal involvement.

We end up working an enormous amount of hours. Because think of it, we go through 1900 schedules. That is the initial, and then after we get everything and we have to check it to make sure it's correct. Once we recheck it, we then give final grades and we do it again. So think how many hours we're spending, and counselors do none of that. They should not be doing any of that in this state.

However, Barbara said she has built a relationship with Blake and this relationship enhances collaboration during registration so that she is able to advocate for students. She said “the longer I work with him, the more willing he is to hear my side.” School counselors use these communication and collaborative skills to identify gaps and inequities in their schools that may hinder a student’s college aspirations.

### *Use of Data*

School counselors in the study used data to assess problems in their schools such as talented students not enrolling in rigorous courses and to identify unfair policies. The school counselors are split in their use of data. A few of school counselors use data daily, while the others are very uncomfortable using data and do not use it regularly. However, data is used by the majority of the school counselors to encourage students to take upper-level courses.

The participants are aware of the connection between rigorous courses and college access. All of the participants stressed the importance of students taking upper-level, college preparatory courses such as honors and Advanced Placement. The school counselors encourage students that have high test scores and high grades in standard level courses to enroll in more rigorous courses. Personal knowledge of the student is also important so that

the school counselor can identify students with the ability to take higher-level courses.

Amber said,

Because everything is driven by data and sometimes you have a kid that you want to give it a try and you have to have a good understanding of that kid that they can do it. I have gone to bat for them. One time I was proven wrong and the other two times I was proven right. I got resistance from the teachers, well they didn't do that well, but I know of special situations. But sometimes it is the teachers who are not happy with having a kid in there who made a 75 or 79 in an advanced class. You've got to give them a chance.

Chelsea said at Central High School they have held honors and Advanced Placement information sessions to encourage enrollment in those courses. Finally, Bob said he felt they did an excellent job of getting students into college preparatory courses at Branson High School because the majority of their students graduate on the college preparatory graduation track.

Additionally, Bob said you could also use data to challenge unfair policies relating to course enrollment although he did see the need for standard policies and procedures.

Rigid rules when they are arbitrary, and not based in data, and you have evidence that this kid can handle it, then I think they need to be challenged. At the same time I don't think you should throw out guidelines and prerequisites. When the kid comes in and you look at their record and you say I think this kid needs more support. I wouldn't really want to challenge something like that. You need ability, but you also need effort. And you need to do the work to take AP classes. I'm not a huge advocate for moving someone up, I have to have something to go on.

Charles also felt advocacy by a school counselor was needed if a student had been negatively impacted by a school policy.

In particular, the school counselors at Branson High School stressed the importance of data due to Blake's leadership style and reliance on data. Blake felt his school counselors did not need to advocate for students to enter higher level courses because he was already an advocate for students and allowed most students to take these courses if they wanted the

challenge. He also said school counselors needed to understand and use data at the level where they could read a transcript and understand test scores. Barbara disagreed somewhat with her principal and believed advocacy was still needed.

Our principal is so extremely hands-on and looking at every registration, and that's where when I take this registration packet I am like a lawyer going to represent my client. He is looking over all the classes they want to take, and I have to have all my ducks in a row of why we want him in these classes. Okay, you may think they're a risk, but this and this and this. The principal knows that a student has to be allowed to take courses by the time they graduate, and I agree with some of his mentality that you have to walk before you can run. And I think he does a good job and that is the key to a lot of his success is that he screens and unlike a lot of principals he understands prerequisites. That's great because he knows the same things we know, and I've worked for principals who were not as well versed in that. But by the same token it makes it more difficult for a kid who needs someone to advocate... The mentality that I have to go fight to get my kids in classes, where at other schools the principal does not even know what's going on. Where at other schools I could use my own discretion. And I'm a counselor who's going to try to put a kid where I think they need to be... I totally understand his mentality, it's how I get around it to advocate.

However, Brock, a mathematics teacher, substantiated Blake's claim by saying:

At this school (Branson), we are not concerned about our math test scores. Students are not steered in to Technical Math instead of Geometry. The students actively choose to take Technical Math.

Several school counselors did not regularly use data because they are not comfortable with its use, explaining that school counseling is about a personal relationship with students and the excessive use of data depersonalized the experience. Their discomfort with data may be due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of how to most effectively use data to advocate for students. Ashley expressed her feelings by saying,

No, I don't look at data and I know that's horrible. I know we need to maybe I'm old-fashioned. I just do what I do but that's not good enough when we have to substantiate having five counselors versus four. So I know that somehow that's going to come to bite us. I've done a little better as far as having the students to sign in so that I can keep track. When I enrolled families we have them sign in. But I am not, that is where I need to improve.

In general, the school counselors in this study do not use data to promote systemic change. As discussed previously, they use data to identify individuals that are talented and not taking advantage of their intellectual gifts. These students are the primary problem they identified in their schools. Bob and Charles did briefly mention identifying unfair policies, but no other school counselor discussed policies or practices that promote inequities in the schools. They also did not discuss data as it relates to an achievement gap in their schools, except to identify student ability as an advocacy factor that is out of their control. Student ability will be discussed in a later section. While describing advocacy behaviors, they do not use data to evaluate their programs to see where there are gaps so that they can serve more students. The use of data was focused more at the individual, instead of school-wide level. Participants had difficulty identifying inequities in their own schools.

### *Empowering Families*

Most of the participants in the study valued the contribution of the family and viewed family empowerment as integral to an increase in college access. This important advocacy skill could contradict with a disposition towards taking on a parental role. The participants discussed the importance of family empowerment; however they had a disposition for stepping in to the parental role when it was needed. As a school counselor, Amy felt it was her ethical duty to support the families and community of their students.

I think it's our job to increase parental support. It's important to reach out in ways that will touch them through their churches, or through their local organizations to provide them with a safe environment and to help educate them about what the process should look like for them (so) that it doesn't have to be intimidating.

In addition, Ashley stressed the need for parent education because many of the parents have not attended college themselves. Bob agreed by saying,

The parents don't know what going to college is all about, so if someone does not step up to the plate and say this is what you do and point them in the right direction, it's game over... It's sad when someone has an advantage because they're just more savvy. Because their parents know how the game is played. I think I try to equalize that by getting timely information to parents.

He felt educating parents on how to play the college game was one of the responsibilities of the school counselor.

Jumping through the hoops can be anything from filling out the FAFSA, doing community service, and getting your ticket punched so you will have an impressive resume and can apply for those scholarships that require a 2.5 GPA.

Amber summed up the disposition towards family support by saying a school counselor must have the belief that parents have a "place of importance in their family life."

Many of the school counselors, administrators, and teachers mentioned very specific examples of outreach to families. School counselors conduct parent orientations, senior and junior parent nights, and financial aid night. Ashley introduces parents to the county website and Andrea said the school counselors at Adams High School educate parents on the parent module on the county website where parents can monitor their children's academic progress. Additionally, Barbara said she invites parents to participate in conference calls with college admissions representatives and Chelsea educates parents on how and who to contact in the school system if they are concerned about their child. Barbara said,

One of the things that I tell the parents that often break the ice, I say you're younger than I am but if I didn't do this for a living I wouldn't know what to do either. It's a whole different terminology, you almost need a dictionary for how everything is changing. When we were in school, even just 10 years ago, we were like sheep we were just led and told what to do. Now I have so many options, you almost need a strategist, what is the best way to help my child? I give them my card, show them the website, give them the dates of their reporting periods, let me print out your child's teachers. If you don't want to go online, here is a number. I try to be a liaison. If they don't feel comfortable, I will sit in on the conference. I am not so much a part of the bureaucracy, I do work here and my job is to help your child and if I can help you as a parent, then I am helping. If a parent and student has confidence in you, you're going to be able to disseminate more information to them.

Finally, Brie said she is starting to get more emails from parents, which shows parental outreach is working.

As an administrator, Ava says she does see the school counselors at Adams High school educating parents on topics such as student enrollment in challenging, college preparatory courses. Again, she stressed parents and students should understand all the possibilities that exist for them after high school. Amber emphasized this sentiment by saying “awareness and knowledge of what is out there is very important, because a lot of kids look at college and say I don’t have the grades or my parents don’t have the money.” Blake, the principal at Branson High School, felt the one area his school counselors could improve is more parental outreach and education for students that are struggling academically. There did seem to be a contradiction among the participants when they emphasized family empowerment because if the families chose not to become involved, the school counselors were quick to dismiss the importance of the parents, and take on the parental role themselves.

### *Systemic Change*

Many of the participants identified environmental and family barriers to advocacy, which will be discussed in a later section. While discussing these barriers, four school counselors and one administrator also discussed how they challenge or deal with these barriers. Many of these strategies acknowledged school counselors are a part of a larger educational system and effective advocacy sometimes means challenging this system. The participants stressed they would not want a student to miss out on opportunities because of obstacles that are out of their control. As an administrator, Ava felt that the role of the school counselor advocate was to remove and help a student tackle those obstacles. Amy agreed by

saying it was a school counselors' role to push the "educational envelope" when necessary to get positive results for students. Angela reiterated this belief by saying she would go over someone's head if necessary to impact change. In addition, Amy felt school counselors need to advocate for themselves and their students outside of their profession in the community and society.

I think it's unbelievable because without advocacy we aren't able to change what is above us, without people stepping out and saying this isn't right, you're not providing access for these students. You know the school counseling profession is a way we can provide better access, we can change what we are doing. Without advocacy from above, people from outside our professional organization, it's harder to change the national image of school counselors. It's harder to change the student's image of what their school counselor can do for them.

This higher level of advocacy is necessary in order to create change in the schools.

Finally, Chelsea said effective advocacy entailed advocating with administration because she felt "sometimes they are more about the school and we're more about the student." In addition, both Chelsea and Barbara questioned the existence of lower-level courses in their schools. Chelsea said "right now we have a lot of foundational courses and it is a double-edged sword. The purpose is to keep them in the course and slow down the pace, but sometimes they get stuck in the foundational courses and never progress." Barbara tackled this systemic issue in her school by questioning her principal, Blake, about the types of teachers he placed in these classes.

But by the same token they do not staff their lower level math classes with the best teachers. If you get your least desirable teachers in your lower-level classes, it's like a purgatory for kids. If you can't get a kid out of pre-algebra and into algebra one, what are their choices?

Amy also studied the curriculum at Adams High School to identify systemic issues.

I think at least from my perspective as lead (counselor), it's helping to look at the overall picture of courses and look at differences in test scores and differences in coursework between a subject area. So looking at US History and where are the gaps

and where do we see low rigor. Because until we increase rigor across the board in all classes, it's much harder to increase rigor in honors and AP, and to encourage more students to go into honors and AP if the rigor is not there. So addressing the issue with a lot of the departments and seeing where the gaps are and looking at their faculty and seeing where they can make those improvements. At least in my role I can do that. And it's helping teach the other counselors to look at that big picture so they can understand that as well.

Only one school counselor in the study, Amy, explicitly described her advocacy behavior as systemic. All of the school counselors in the study were asked during the interview how they used data to promote systemic change and had difficulty answering the question. The schools counselors either did not understand, and asked the researcher to repeat the question, or they just answered the question as to how they used data generally. However, several of the school counselors described advocacy behaviors that dealt with advocating for systemic change in their schools.

### *Summary*

Participants identified a variety of advocacy behaviors that school counselors utilize to increase college access. They utilize the resources of two-year colleges to support students for whom a four-year college immediately following high school may not be the right fit. School counselors also use a variety of tools to effectively advocate for their students' college access. They use communication and collaboration skills to work with students, parents, the community, teachers, and administrators. Some of the school counselors use their advocacy skills to challenge policies and procedures and encourage more students to enroll in rigorous, college preparatory courses. Additionally, Some of the school counselors do advocate for themselves and their students by addressing systemic issues.

## Advocacy Factors

When asked about factors that impact the use of advocacy, the school counselors emphasized their personal and professional backgrounds. Complacency of other school counselors also impacted the use of school counselor advocacy. When asked about environmental factors, many of the participants mentioned barriers to advocacy that come from the community. Some of these barriers were parent educational levels, parental participation, low parental expectations of their children, and poverty. In addition, the participants cited a lack of time, school counselor ratios, inappropriate duties and roles, paperwork, testing, district and state policies, and the mathematics ability of students. The background and complacency of school counselors impact their disposition to practice advocacy. However, while many advocacy factors impact advocacy dispositions, knowledge, and skills, they do not fit neatly in to Brown and Trusty's (2005) advocacy competencies. All of these factors impact the context of professional practice for these participants. Since context varies between schools, as well as districts and states, it is believed context should be thoroughly examined. Context and its impact on Brown and Trusty's (2005) advocacy competencies will be more thoroughly discussed in Chapter V.

### *Dispositions*

#### *School Counselor Background*

All of the school counselors in the study believed they were advocates for their students. They described their advocacy in different ways, some emphasizing empathy, a parental role, and family support. During their interviews, the participants shared stories from

their personal and professional background that has driven them to become school counselors and advocates for their students.

Half of the school counselors described in great detail their experience as a first-generation college student and how this experience has motivated them to advocate for their students. This is an interesting outcome of the study because many of the school counselors would identify themselves as underrepresented as it pertains to college access. Ashley said she was a first-generation college student and she believed the only reason she began college was through the outreach of a college admissions officer .

Somehow, I made it okay, fortunately I guess. Yes right out of high school, I went straight to a four-year. I did go to it too, like we had a little summer bridge program I did go to that. To be honest, I was one of the ones, the admissions officer called me and was like we have your application, but you haven't sent in your housing stuff, what are you doing? I was like I don't know, because I didn't get into my first choice. I did get accepted but I didn't have enough money. He was like look, we have this bridge program. Really that person was my person who got me on track. It was an admissions person and he was like come check it out and talked to my mom and made her so comfortable enough to allow me to go and that was it for me.

Anne was also the first in her family to go to college.

I didn't have anyone before me to say oh this is what you do or this is what you don't do. So I just had to wing it, through the paperwork the financial aid, I just had to figure it out myself. I had to pay for it myself, so I did it. So now for the student who is like me, that middle-of-the-road person, you didn't have anyone to go to college before you, not even first-generation, you're the first to go to school. That's why they laugh at me and my alphabet; I have all the alternative school kids. I feel these kids' pain, because I am one of those. I tend to push them probably more because they need more help. No one helped me; I did it completely by myself. So I think more programs, more technology, more access will help students like myself. Because I am one of those kids.

Additionally, Angela said she grew up in a rural, farming community where no one went to college. She grew up in this “area where the majority of kids did not go to college, you just stayed, got a job, and got married.” Like the other school counselors at Adams High School, she was the first in her family to attend college.

Bill also grew up poor, and was an average student who joined the military after high school.

I kind of look back when I was growing up, we were a very poor family. We didn't have running water or indoor bathrooms. When I was in high school, I was one of those kids, basically a good kid but I wasn't going anywhere. I didn't have the tools at that time to go to college. I didn't have good grades. I barely graduated from high school, so I have a lot in common with some of these kids I see today. They may not have had it as rough as I did and they didn't have to do the things I did but they go through similar experiences. I was the first in my family to finish college. Through the military I found out how important education is especially with the math, because when you're working with explosives you need to know how to divide and subtract. I was a master gunner in the Army and in order to calibrate you have to use math. In high school I remember telling my teacher what do I need algebra for I'll never use it. But I found out I needed it. And I've actually located my math teacher and thanked him for sticking with me.

Finally, Amber also shared her experiences.

I'm one of those kids; my dad had an eighth-grade education. My parents were divorced at a young age and I lived with my grandmother and my father. Because of his education I was always looked down upon as the black sheep of the family. They always thought I was going to be the first one knocked up and not wed. I would drop out of high school and not do anything because he didn't do anything. I was the horse they never counted on because I've done more and I succeeded where the other grandkids did not. And it was just because of the finger pointing, you know your dad was crap and you're going to be too. I just wanted more. I did quit high school, I admit it. I hated it, it was a joke. I quit and I went to night school, I supported myself and I worked. I goofed around because I didn't have any direction, but I finally did get direction. You have to figure out what you want in life, you look around anything do I want to live a different type of life? And I wanted a different type of life.

In addition to their experiences of being the first in their family to attend college as well as growing up in poverty, half of the school counselors discussed either a nonexistent or a negative relationship with their school counselor in high school. Ashley, Anne, and Bill said they never met with their school counselor in high school. Anne said,

Not to say that we didn't have it, but I don't remember anyone in high school saying hey do step 1, 2, and 3. I don't want to badmouth my school and say no one did it, I just don't remember them doing it. And I'm sure if someone would have done it I would have taken part in it. So I'm thinking they didn't do it. Like we had financial aid night here last week, and I just don't remember any of that.

Their perception of the school counselor was one who met only with the top students that were going to college. Ashley said, “my mom says I don’t remember your counselor doing any of the stuff that you do for students, and I was like, yeah, you’re kind of right.”

In contrast to the lack of a relationship many of the interviewed school counselors had with their school counselor, a few of the school counselors actually had a negative relationship. While discussing her school counselor, Barbara said “I found the way that counselor operated as very offensive because I knew in my core even though I was the oldest and neither of my parents had gone to college, I knew that I was going.” Clara attended high school in Germany while growing up in a military family.

I didn't know who my counselor was in high school. I remember I wanted to be an archaeologist ever since I was in the third grade. My counselor drove the one and a half hours to my home and talked to my mother and said she can't do this because she just doesn't have the physical constitution and she'll always be poor. I never personally met with that counselor, nothing. But evidently it left a big impression on me. Everything happens and our experiences make us who we are.

Several other factors in their background were highlighted by school counselors as impacting their use of advocacy. Two of the school counselors, Bill and Chelsea, enlisted in the military before attending college. This experience helped them to value a college education as well as using the military as an option for some students. In addition, three of the school counselors worked in very different high schools before working at their current school. Amy worked at a high-performing school in another southern state before coming to work at Adams High School. She said the needs of a low-performing high school were different, and advocacy was needed more for students at Adams High School. Bill and Barbara both worked at Adams High School prior to working at Branson High School. Bill

had a negative experience with his principal and the school, while Barbara, a White school counselor, had a positive experience.

One my best experiences as a counselor happened at Adams High School. Which is a predominately Black school, a very proud heritage. But I learned through certain things of the shoe being on the other foot. When sometimes comments are made or assumptions are made based on the color of your skin, with no malice. It was very good sensitivity training. Everybody on the IEP (Individualized Education Plan) committee was Black, and if White parents came they called my office for me to come. I was always on the committee but only called to come when there was an IEP for a White student. They meant no harm by it, but reflecting back on it and there were certain things you saw. I thought this was a very empathetic, public relations savvy thing the principal did. But if he had a conference with a White parent and student, and many times if it was my student, they would call me in. Just I think to build fairness.

#### *School Counselor Complacency*

In addition to a school counselor's background, the complacency of school counselors also affects the use of school counselor advocacy. While the majority of school counselors spoke favorably of colleagues both at their school and in the field of school counseling, two of the school counselors felt as if school counselors had become complacent in their job, hindering their ability to effectively advocate. Angela said,

I think a lot of counselors should be, but I don't think they're student advocates. A lot of counselors even though they complain about the paperwork, and some of that you have to do it, but I think a lot of counselors even though they complain about it, they are comfortable with it and would rather do the paperwork than work with students.

Additionally, Barbara stated that "there are people in our profession that give us a negative connotation because they are going through the motions or they are like I am so close to retirement I don't even care." She said this attitude also hindered the mentoring of younger school counselors who wanted to learn how to become a better school counselor and advocate.

In this study, school counselors possess an understanding of factors such as school counselor background and complacency that may impact their ability to advocate for students. In addition, there are environmental factors that define the context in which these school counselors work. This knowledge of context will allow them to work around and challenge these factors so school counselors can impact the greatest number of students.

### *Context*

#### *Student Ability*

A barrier discussed by over half of the participants was the academic ability of their students. According to the participants, this lack of ability for some students directly correlated with their ability to complete higher level, mathematics courses. Students must complete a mathematics sequence of Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, and a higher level math in order to be admitted to a four-year college in the state of the conducted study. Bob stated that over a third of ninth graders in the state are not ready for Algebra I when they begin high school. Being unprepared for Algebra I in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade may cause students to fall behind in the college preparatory sequence. Paul (2005) indicated that the later a student completed Algebra I in high school, the less likely the student was to complete advanced mathematics courses.

Even when students successfully complete Algebra I, they still may not be able to take college preparatory mathematics. Chelsea said,

Testing, test driven, data, the increased math requirements, those two things mostly can drive what pathway a student goes into. A student who does not do well in Algebra I, which may be for a variety of reasons, and they score low and they are steered into technical math and then never have the opportunity to get what they need to get to go to a four year school.

Brock, a mathematics teacher at Branson High School, said that while Technical Math is sometimes used to prepare students for Geometry, this is a rare occurrence.

I do have a student that is now passing Geometry that took Technical Math first. However, most of my Technical Math students stay on the Technical Math track and never take Geometry. These are usually are usually the weaker math students, although I do have a few that are stronger and do take Geometry and Algebra 2.

Andy, a mathematics teacher at Adams High School, explained even students that enroll in Geometry may not be able to complete additional college preparatory mathematics courses. “Geometry is what I call...the hinge on the door. If you don’t pass Geometry, chances are you’re not going any farther. If you pass Geometry, you’ll do what you need to do to pass Algebra II; you’ll do what you need to do to pass the other math class you need.”

Courtney, a mathematics teacher at Central High School said one of the reasons for the low mathematics achievement of their students was not their own ability but their own personal low expectations. “And I think a big barrier is overcoming our (the school’s) reputation of our low achievement level. And in turn, the lower achievement level fosters lowered expectations for our students.”

Many of the participants described student ability as something that is fixed, and cannot be changed, particularly once a student is in high school. They were very willing to advocate for the gifted student that is placed in low-level classes, but did not share how they advocate for students that have less academic ability. Theoretical literature (House & Hayes, 2002; House & Sears, 2002) defines advocacy as empowering students by teaching self-help skills. School counselors can teach study skills, time management, and organization, which are all skills that improve academic achievement at the high school and post-secondary level. They can also identify resources to improve academic ability such as tutoring and teach students how to access these resources. Participants in the study were asked specifically

about empowering students, and many responded by continuing to emphasize making college information available so students and families would understand the process. Many of the school counselors did not connect the role of the school counselor to an improvement in academic achievement.

### *Family Environment*

A second barrier that was addressed is the impact of the family on student ability. The knowledge of family dynamics was integral for advocacy. Most of the participants at Adams and Central high schools discussed barriers to advocacy that originated in the family or the community. Anne said one of the barriers was poverty and the economic situations of families led to a lack of participation in after-school college preparation activities and programs for these students. Many of these programs are geared toward educating students about college. Ava, an African American assistant principal, spoke of her experiences with race and poverty.

You need to have knowledge of the mindset of people who grew up in poverty; it's so interesting because I realized a while back we always used to talk about White/Black racial issues. That is not even an issue, because kids come in my office and they're Black and I don't even understand them. Knowledge of socioeconomic differences is really the key, because we talk about the achievement gap, but I think the achievement gap is based more on poverty than race. Because I don't get them (the students) either, a White teacher came in (and was frustrated) and I said don't worry I feel the same way.

The participants felt the poverty of families as well as the families' own educational experiences contributed to their values toward and involvement in their children's education. They believed many of the parents do not participate in their children's education and that is one of the reasons school counselor advocacy was needed. This belief drives the disposition to take on a parental role with students. Corey, the principal at Central High School, believed

“counselors need to be advocates, because many times parents aren’t.” Angela said some parents had dropped out of high school or not attended college and Barbara agreed, saying she frequently hears from parents that the college admissions process “is all so new to me.” Clara also felt some parents had negative experiences with education and possibly even a negative experience with their own school counselor.

In addition to a lack of involvement, Corey believed some parents have low expectations for their children and this leads to students having low expectations for themselves. “There are lots of bright students that can go out and succeed but they’re told that they can’t and that is where the home life comes into play.” Andrea, a mathematics teacher at Adams High School, said many of the parents have no intention of their child every going to college. Andy, a mathematics teacher, summed up the families’ value system.

If they’re (students) learning a certain set of values at home, they’re going to take those values into the school and us telling them as teachers and counselors that what you’re doing is not right or has to change is often going to be taken with deaf ears because they’re hearing a more important voice that is being communicated at home.

### *Role Confusion*

In addition to student ability and family barriers, school counselors identified barriers within their schools. The majority of the participants cited the lack of time as one of the major barriers to advocacy. This lack of time robbed many of the school counselors’ ability to define themselves and their role. Amy stated their student body is very transient, so they spend much of their day enrolling new students and managing the accompanying paperwork. She also said they have too large a student to counselor ratio, which means they are responsible for a large number of students.

The school counselors are overloaded; they have too large a student to counselor ratio. And so they do what every person would when they’re overwhelmed, they say I’ve got

to get certain things done, so they have to choose what is most important and for the most part what trumps, you know the overall goals of the guidance is you know the day-to-day things and deadlines you have to meet for your principal.

Clara also said she had a large caseload with over 300 students. In addition, Andy, a mathematics teacher at Adams High School, said he most often saw the school counselors spending their time scheduling students into courses.

In order to effectively implement school counseling programs, ASCA recommends a student-school counselor ratio of 250 to one ([www.schoolcounselor.org](http://www.schoolcounselor.org), 2006). In the 2005-06 school year, school counseling ratios for all schools ranged from a low of 60 to one in Rhode Island to a high of 920 to one in California. For high schools, Rhode Island had a ratio of 40 to one, and California had a ratio of 488 to one. Nationwide, 33 states had ratios of 250 to one or better in their high schools ([www.schoolcounselor.org](http://www.schoolcounselor.org), 2006). School counselor to student ratios are important because research indicates that schools that have ratios of 200 to one or better spend significantly more time on postsecondary admissions counseling (Hawkins & Clinedinst, 2006).

Many of the school counselors at Adams and Central high schools felt one of the primary reasons for their lack of time was that other school personnel did not understand the role of a school counselor. Amy said this role confusion leads administrators to assign duties to school counselors because there is no one else to do the job. Clara said to some degree she understood why administrators assigned these duties to school counselors because “when you want the job done and done well, who do they choose, the counselors.”

Ashley acknowledged she is partly to blame for the role confusion between school counselors, administrators, and other school personnel.

I wish we (school counselors) could be more consistent because we're all trying to do the same things. To be better advocates for all of our students, but there's not enough

consistency school to school and that's a problem I think. I don't know, I just do what I do. I do think here we need to go back and do an assessment, it's just finding the time. Those are all lovely things to do, we need to be set up doing the models with the ASCA model. I think we do those things, it's just that we haven't sat down and categorized all that. That's probably why I have a hard time verbalizing this (advocacy). Because I don't think that way. But I think that is partly my fault for not setting it up the other way and letting teachers know and administrators know and school board members know and all the folks coming and criticizing our school know what we should be doing.

She believed she also has some confusion over exactly what her role should be so that made it difficult for others to appropriately use school counselors by placing them into counseling related duties and responsibilities. Amy also described how role confusion impacts school counselors and the profession.

I don't think there is consistency between districts and schools and what the community thinks the school counseling role should look like. You know there is no one that is overseeing and making sure that is being done. And so I think that we, as a profession, if we had oversight and better advocacy for our profession and for kids, that would be a bigger push. I don't think school counselors are neglectful on the whole or don't want to help kids. I think they do, I just think they're overwhelmed with duties. The bad part is that it's very hard to identify what is overwhelming you. You know to actually figure out well I need more time with kids. But what is keeping you from it? There is a list of duties that keep everybody from doing it. It's just making that happen.

In addition, there is some disagreement between the new principal at Central High School, Corey, and his school counselors regarding some of their responsibilities that are not directly related to counseling. Charles said,

The new principal is starting to pull the counselors away from counseling duties and into new duties which has caused tension. There are some things that should not be our function such as monitoring sporting activities. That is what they have booster clubs for. Luckily we don't have to go in and teach classes. I can't be available to a student who comes in to talk about how their dad beat them up last night if I'm in a classroom.

However, Corey felt school counselors were a part of the school staff so they should be responsible for duties such as athletics and discipline like everyone else. He did admit this

requirement does sometimes pull school counselors away from students. Ava, the Assistant Principal at Adams High School, agreed with Corey that duties such as testing, scheduling, and data entry took away from time with students and said “we as an administrative team need to improve as far as assignments and what we have assigned them to do.”

Blake has a different perspective from his administrative colleagues and believed his school counselors should not be testing or performing any other administrative duties.

When the child disrupts the class, I have to take care of the discipline. So I deal with it harshly. I don't want my school counselors to be like that. So what I'd expect for my counselors, and what they need is sensitivity training, which my administrators don't always have. And you understand why, because we are administrators, we are not counselors. But if we see that a kid is struggling, we're going to send him home for three days and he breaks down and cries I don't need to be counseling him. I need to find somebody who can. I don't have time to listen to all the sob stories, I want my counselors to do that. My counselor can come to me, and say you know this kid has some issues that we really need to deal with. And I'm going to say, okay how can I help. So I want my counselors to have time to do that, and they will because they are not going to be doing all the administrative stuff.

As a result of his perspective, he believed his school counselors had the time to work with students. The school counselors at Branson High School did not describe many environmental barriers in their school or discuss being confused about their role like the school counselors in the other two high schools.

#### *District and State Barriers*

In addition to barriers within the school and community, many of the participants at Adams and Branson high schools were able to focus their attention outside of their school and community and discuss barriers at the state and district level. Amy works at a low-performing high school that has received significant media attention for the low achievement of its students. She expressed frustration that district level administrators dictate policies and

procedures for the school without understanding their unique needs. She felt these policies and procedures inhibited school counselor advocacy and made it more difficult for their students to reach their goal of college. Amber echoed the frustration of working at a school that is seen in such a negative light.

I could just say what I would do if I was superintendent. If you have a school that is low performing, you should look at where it stems from and not point fingers. Because a kid doesn't just wake up in the ninth grade and say oh my god I can't read. That starts at the middle school, it starts in elementary school and I think you have to look backwards instead of forwards. You have to trace the steps back and see if you can stop the problem from occurring because now you have a ninth grader who's reading at a fifth-grade level and you point fingers at the high school. They need to stop pointing the finger at us and shift the focus to where it needs to be. Because by the ninth grade, if you can't read or do reading, writing, and arithmetic you're not going to get it. Everyone's at blame here, not just the teachers but the parents also. It is systemic.

While Amber did identify that the problem of student achievement was systemic, she placed all the blame on other schools. Her value validates the belief that student ability in high school is stagnant, and a student that has low ability will never be able to take higher level classes. If a student does not have the ability to pursue a college preparatory track, the school counselor would find it much more difficult to advocate for that student within this context.

Many participants also discussed the importance of an improvement in test scores. Pressure is placed on teachers to improve scores and this can be a barrier to placing students in higher-level courses, particularly in low-achieving schools such as Adams High School and Central High School. Anne said this pressure was a barrier, because “no one wants a slower kid in their class, because they’re getting in trouble for test scores.” This pressure can impede the advocacy efforts of school counselors. Like Amber, Anne expressed that student ability

would not change, and did not identify how school counselors could support the success of lower-achieving students in more rigorous courses.

In addition, participants from Branson High School discussed the new graduation requirements that have been passed in the state. The new requirement states all students must complete higher levels of mathematics, including Geometry. Participants do not know whether all of their students are capable of passing these courses. Bob said,

I don't have the magic answer as to whether Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, and an advanced math which is college ready is within everyone's reach, and we're just not hitting it or if that's just a rigorous standard and some people (can't make it).

Bob wants to believe more students can take these higher-level courses but he has seen some of his students fail in these courses. Barbara said she agreed that mathematics is important, "but to send the message out that everyone must be university prep is having your head in the sand." Her principal, Blake, agreed by saying the root of these policies is the belief that "if you don't have a college education you're nothing." He believed students all have different gifts and should therefore have a variety of post-secondary options and plans. His viewpoint is interesting given the focus of the study on four-year colleges. Many of the participants shared his view that not all students should go to college.

The participants from Branson High School believed this policy would prohibit some students from even graduating high school instead of the intended result of preparing more students for college. They believed not all students can meet this rigorous standard. They thought all students are different and have different ability levels and should therefore have different options both in high school and post-secondary. However, these participants did believe the completion of higher level mathematics courses would lead to higher levels of enrollment in four-year colleges and universities.

### *Summary*

There are a variety of factors that impact the use of school counselor advocacy by the participants in this study. Their background motivated many to advocate for students. Additionally, school counselors in this study possess an understanding of both environmental and family parameters. Many of these parameters such as complacent colleagues, student ability, poverty, and the educational values of families are out of their control. Admittedly, some of the barriers such as role confusion may be intertwined and could be impacted by the school counselors advocating for themselves and their profession. Also, some of the barriers over which they have no control may be impacted by the use of advocacy for students and families.

### Conclusion

These twelve school counselors identified themselves as student advocates and contributed to each of their schools. They, as well as the other participants, had vivid descriptions of advocacy as well as examples of strategies they use within their schools to promote college access for some but not all of their underrepresented students. Most possessed a deep sense of empathy and care for their students as well as a commitment to help each and every student reach their potential. They believed a disposition for advocacy was essential to increase college access for underrepresented students. Barbara emphasized the importance of advocacy by saying:

I really hold myself to a standard. I'm sarcastic sometimes, but I'm idealistic. And I truly believe in what we do, in the difference we make. And what scares me is that there is so much to be done, and the nervousness in my stomach (asks) have I done what I'm supposed to do?

The school counselors also were motivated by unique personal and professional experiences and challenges. These experiences encouraged them to provide professional counseling services to their students and to advocate for students when it was needed. These school counselors also faced some very real challenges to their professional practice. School counselors at Adams and Central high schools work with a large number of students and families in poverty. They also face the expectations of principals who are new to their schools. Conversely, at Branson High School, school counselors do serve a diverse student body, however their students and families do not face the same challenges. Additionally, they work with a more established principal who has very clear expectations of the school counselor's role.

School counselors at all three high schools work diligently to promote college access for many of their students and provide an array of counseling services for students and families. While analyzing and structuring the data around these three topics, a rich picture emerged of the complexities involved in practicing school counselor advocacy. Further analysis in Chapter V will place these data in the context of the contemporary scholarship and research on college access for underrepresented students. This analysis will examine the data critically and provide recommendations for school counselors and other educators as they work to improve college access.

## CHAPTER V DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study is to explore school counselor advocacy as it pertains to high school counselors increasing underrepresented students' access to four-year colleges and universities. The purpose of this study was addressed by asking three research questions: (1) How do high school counselors and faculty define school counselor advocacy within the context of increasing college access for underrepresented students? (2) How do high school counselors advocate for underrepresented students in terms of college access? (3) How do high school counselors and faculty describe personal and environmental factors that impact school counselor advocacy in terms of college access? This study briefly stepped into the lives of 12 school counselors, three school administrators, and four mathematics teachers. These educators shared their personal definitions of and experiences with school counselor advocacy. They are from a variety of personal and professional backgrounds and are currently employed by three different high schools.

This study corroborated and expanded upon the research conducted by Field (2002) who studied school counselor advocacy in more general terms. Field (2002) described school counselor advocates taking a stand, focusing on individual students, describing advocacy as a belief system, and describing advocacy as innate and not learned. In addition, barriers to advocacy from Field's study were contextual and included a vague job description, a sense of being undervalued, and the importance of the administrator. This research study examined advocacy within the context of college access to further define school counselor advocacy. Field's (2002) study will be compared to this study in more depth throughout Chapter V.

The results from this study also categorized advocacy behaviors by using the Advocacy Competencies for Professional School Counselors (Brown & Trusty, 2005) in Chapter IV. There is overlap in this study between the advocacy domains of dispositions, knowledge, and skills. For example, the background of school counselors impacts their disposition to practice advocacy, as well as their advocacy knowledge and skills. However, the participants in this study did not highlight specific advocacy knowledge. In Chapter V, the words dispositions and skills will be utilized to display the connection between the advocacy competencies, research questions, and the data.

#### Advocacy Definition

When defining advocacy, the participants stressed the importance of a disposition for advocacy as well as specific advocacy behaviors in order to increase college access. This disposition for advocacy is shown through school counselors empathizing with and caring for students as well as taking on a parental role. However, it is interesting to note that many of the participants had difficulty with the concept of advocating only for a particular group of students such as those underrepresented in a four-year college. These school counselors felt advocacy was no different than traditional counseling practice and school counselors should advocate for every student. Advocacy for all students is part of their personal definition.

Discovering that advocacy is a part of the traditional school counselor's role is unique to this study. The difference could be attributed to the narrow focus of this study as compared to Field's (2002) study. Field did not ask her participants to focus on a particular group of students. Some participants in this study had difficulty advocating for select students. School counselors who felt advocacy was a part of traditional counseling were more likely to

describe advocacy as working with individuals in special situations once a relationship has been established.

Additionally, while half of the school counselors believe advocacy is part of the traditional role of the school counselor, the other half believe advocacy is in addition to traditional roles and responsibilities. Field (2002) found participants defined advocacy as going above and beyond traditional counseling and that advocacy was in addition to traditional roles. School counselors in this study who believe advocacy is an addition to their traditional role more clearly defined advocacy and their role within the school. They also are more comfortable as educational leaders and collaborating with other educators. They defined advocacy more systemically as something a school counselor does with individuals, groups, families, other educators, and the community. These participants described advocacy behaviors that align more closely with the theoretical literature (Bemak & Chung, 2005; House & Martin, 1998). Based on the data, the literature, and the history of school counseling, this researcher believes advocacy is a new role for school counselors. The participants in this study that believed advocacy was part of a traditional counselor's role also described counseling behaviors that were more common in the counseling literature more than 10 years ago, such as a focus on the individual. The other half of the participants described counseling behaviors that are currently more prevalent in the literature such as collaboration and a systemic focus. Across the board, all of the participants expressed the need for advocacy, whether it be for this specific population (underrepresented students) or for all students.

However, none of the school counselors discussed the historical legacy of the school counselor as a gatekeeper or one who only serves a certain group of students, those that are

academically gifted. Underrepresented students are often unable to advocate for themselves and frequently come to the school counselor for assistance in gaining admission to a four-year college. Advocacy for underrepresented students does not imply that you neglect all other students; rather it could be defined as leveling the playing field and providing services and opportunities for students who have historically not attended four-year colleges. School counselors can advocate for all students, but in different ways depending on their individual circumstances. All students may not require equal services from the school counselor, because school counselors work to promote equity in their school by providing different services. By addressing systemic inequities within the school and community, students will have an equal opportunity to attend four-year colleges and universities. A school counselor should believe advocacy is important for underrepresented students in order to increase college access.

#### Advocacy Behaviors

School counselors in this study advocate for college access by becoming knowledgeable about college requirements. Virtually all of the school counselors stressed the importance of encouraging capable students to take high-level college preparatory courses. This understanding that students should take high level courses is important because research (Horn & Kojaku, 2001) indicates that underrepresented students are less likely to enroll in a rigorous, college preparatory course of study. These courses will help to prepare underrepresented students for college. School counselors in this study primarily use data in their practice to encourage students with high test scores and good grades to take these classes. Data is not used to identify issues of inequity in their schools.

These participants frequently discussed the necessity of communication and collaboration skills to build relationships for effective advocacy. Field (2002) also found that having the skills to work with different people is essential for advocacy. Uncovering that communication and collaboration skills are essential to advocacy is not surprising because these two skills have long been a part of graduate training and the identity of the school counselor. School counselors traditionally have exceptional communication and listening skills and are able to work well with others. When giving examples of advocacy, most participants emphasized utilizing these skills in order to learn more about these students as individuals and then advocating for them in special situations.

In addition, the school counselors emphasized the importance of the dispersion of college information to students and families. The dispensation of information is a core piece of advocacy within their schools. They believe all of their students, and in particular underrepresented students, do not have the necessary information to prepare for and apply to college. Many of these students also do not know how to access information that is already widely available. The distribution of information is a core piece of college preparation for underrepresented students according to research conducted by Venezia and Kirst (2005). This study found students that were not underrepresented received more college preparation information than their peers.

However, while all of the participants in the current study emphasized the role of the school counselor as one who distributes college information, they did not overwhelmingly emphasize the empowerment of students and families by teaching them how to use this information. Students and families are frequently bombarded with useful information, but they are not taught how to advocate for themselves in the college admissions process. The

participants seemed to blame the families and the communities for low student ability and apathy. Andy summed up the sentiment of many of the participants by saying the value system students are learning at home is incorrect and the role of education is to communicate the correct value system. They also emphasized that many of the families simply did not have information about college, so the role of advocacy within this context is to provide this information. The school counselor in this study carries all the knowledge about college, and their role is to dispense this information to students, parents, and the community, both individually and in large group settings. While the participants emphasized treating the families with respect, none discussed using what strengths the families' already possess in order to empower them. The participants' value for family involvement was contradictory because at one point they discussed the importance of the family, but then they quickly transitioned to discussing family barriers and the importance of taking on a parental role for students that did not have strong parental involvement. It seemed as if the participants only valued the family if the parents reached out to the school and the counselors; and if they did not become involved the blame was quickly placed on the family and the school counselor had to take on that parental role.

Theoretical literature (House & Martin, 1998) states school counselor advocates should teach students how to help themselves; educate students and parents on how to navigate educational bureaucracies; and teach students and families how to access academic support systems to promote academic success. Social scaffolding, as researched by Sutton (1998), provides a model for teaching academic success skills. This student and family empowerment was not discussed by these participants as a part of advocacy. School counselors can teach these skills as a part of advocacy and improve the likelihood that

underrepresented students will be admitted to and be successful in a four-year college or university. While information is integral to empowerment, strengthening families is essential to students accessing and successfully graduating from college (Horn et al., 2000).

Additionally, some of the school counselors are aware of how the different systems in their schools and community impact the college access of their students. According to theoretical literature (Bemak & Chung, 2005; House & Martin, 1998), challenging policies and practices systemically is an essential part of school counselor advocacy. However, despite this emphasis in the literature on the role school counselors play in systemic change, only four school counselors and one administrator describe their behavior as systemic. While only Amy used the term systemic, the other school counselors and administrator described behaviors that could be classified as systemic or working with people in various systems (i.e. students, families, community members, etc.). Two of these school counselors are department chairs and may be natural leaders, and the other two school counselors have many years experience as a school counselor and may be more comfortable in their role.

Without this emphasis on systemic change, advocacy efforts by the school counselors are only focused on one student at a time. While this focus will help some students, in order to really impact patterns of inequity in schools, a broader focus should be emphasized. School counselors work with all students, teachers, and administrators so they are in a unique position to identify inequities in their schools and positively impact many of their students.

While many of the school counselors in this study did not describe advocacy systemically, some school counselors did contradicting earlier research (Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004). Research found the majority of school counselors did not highly rate school counseling functions that related to systemic issues, including advocacy. One

primary difference between this current study and Perusse et al. (2004) was the focus on context and its impact on advocacy. School counselors in the current study who had more experience in schools, particularly high schools, seem to challenge the hierarchy more often in their schools. They are also more confident in their role and able to describe their behaviors more systemically. In addition, these same school counselors believed advocacy was different from traditional counseling practices. Additionally, the Perusse study was a survey and when words like data and systemic were used in the current research study, the school counselors had difficulty answering the question until additional probes were used. If the Perusse study used words such as data and systemic, it may account for school counselors scoring these items lower than other items.

#### Advocacy Factors

The missing piece of Brown and Trusty's (2005) Advocacy Competencies is the issue of context. Context, with the exception of advocacy barriers, was also not addressed by Field (2002). The conceptual framework provides a model for selecting school counselors with a disposition for advocacy and it provides advocacy competencies that can be used to train graduate students and current school counselors. Context was emphasized throughout this study and impacted the definition and use of advocacy in schools, and some differences did emerge. However, data from this study showed that context was not as influential as expected. Despite differences in schools, as well as the personal and professional backgrounds of school counselors, there were many commonalities amongst the participants. This may be due to the narrow focus of this study as well as a detailed interview guide. The impact of context on the participants' responses will be discussed throughout this section.

One of the most interesting findings of this study was the school counselors' discussion of their personal and professional background and its impact on their use of advocacy. These experiences motivate them and encourage their use of advocacy with their students, particularly ones that remind them of themselves. Also, the majority of the school counselors described themselves as underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities and several did not take a traditional route through college. The finding that many of the school counselors in this study are underrepresented provides additional considerations for advocacy research because other studies have not examined issues such as school counselor background or personality.

While Field (2002) did not specifically address school counselor background, half of her participants did believe advocacy was innate. Data from this study validated that finding. Several of the participants believe advocacy can not be taught, so this disposition can be promoted by recruiting graduate students that are advocates and leaders and possess this personality. This is one of the recommendations from the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI), criteria for change in Counselor Education programs. The first item details criteria for selecting and recruiting candidates for Counselor Education programs. In addition, the disposition competencies in Brown and Trusty's (2005) conceptual framework can be used as a guide in selecting prospective graduate students.

While many participants discussed systemic change, they did not describe systemic barriers to advocacy in their own schools. Within their schools, they primarily discussed factors such as a lack of time and inappropriate duties and responsibilities. They did not identify issues of equity in their own schools, with the exception of Barbara's concern over weak mathematics teachers in low-level courses, and Chelsea questioning low-level

foundational courses in her school. The participants readily identified barriers in their community such as poverty and a lack of parental involvement. They also focused on district and state barriers such as the emphasis on testing and the new high school graduation requirements. Identifying barriers is not unique to this study, because Field's (2002) study identified environmental barriers to advocacy. However, this study did expand on Field's findings by examining community, district, and state barriers. The lack of personal and school barriers indicate the participants have difficulty turning a critical eye on themselves and their schools. Self-reflection by the participants along with needs assessments utilizing data can help to identify areas of improvement for educators and their schools while improving outcomes for students.

While there are many consistencies in the definition of advocacy amongst the participants at the three schools, there are some differences particularly in the area of barriers to advocacy. The participants in the study are employed by three different high schools and consequently describe different barriers to advocacy. The school counselors at Branson High School were less likely to discuss environmental and family barriers to advocacy than the participants from the other two high schools. Adams High School and Central High School serve different student populations than Branson High School and face more challenges to college access for their students and families. Over 80% of their students are minorities, and over 50% are low-income. These statistics suggest that more of their students are underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities and are in greater need of school counselor advocacy. In addition, school counselors at Adams High School and Branson High School spoke extensively about family support, but it was rarely mentioned at Central High School. The participants' belief in the value of family support is critical because research

(Horn et al., 2000) indicates that higher levels of family involvement leads to an increase in enrollment at four-year colleges and universities for underrepresented students.

When discussing barriers outside of their immediate school or community, the participants from Adams High School focused on district level barriers and those from Branson High School focused on the state. The participants from Central High School rarely discussed barriers outside of their school. This difference may be due to the pressure that Adams High School is currently under from the district to improve their school and raise test scores. Additionally, while Central High School is also low-achieving they have managed to escape the media scrutiny directed at Adams High School because their test scores are moderately higher. Branson High School is free from this scrutiny altogether and instead receives media and district praise so they are free to focus their advocacy efforts at a much higher level. While there are many consistencies amongst all three schools when defining and describing school counselor advocacy, these differences in context or advocacy factors did impact the definition of advocacy as well as advocacy behaviors within each school.

Fitch and Marshall (2004) found that school counselors in high performing schools were able to spend more time working with students and implementing programs that were more comprehensive in nature. According to the participants, the school counselors at Branson High School did have more time, and were less likely to be driven by outside influences. However, it is unknown as to whether their lack of environmental and family barriers can be attributed to the environment of a high performing school or the influence of their principal. It is likely that both factors influenced their ability to function solely as school counselors.

Additionally, the perspective of administrators and teachers in this study was particularly important. The value that administrators and teachers place on advocacy influences the use of advocacy by school counselors. Perusse et al. (2004) found that school counselors and administrators value and prioritize similar counseling functions. This study also found advocacy was not highly rated by administrators or school counselors.

The perspectives of administrators and teachers differentiate this study from previous research (Field, 2002) on school counselor advocacy. While all of the school counselors provided rich detail about their advocacy behaviors, administrators and teachers from Adams High School and Central High School expressed they had rarely seen school counselors advocate for students in areas such as challenging students to take higher-level courses and the use of data. These perspectives do not mean school counselors at these schools are not advocating for students, instead it may mean school counselors are not publicizing what services they are providing for students. School counselors may also not be advocating for their students as much as they believe. Additionally, many are not collaborating effectively with other personnel or utilizing their leadership skills. These school counselors should be reaching out of their offices to advocate for students. According to the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) (The Educational Trust, 2003) and theoretical literature (Bemak & Chung, 2005; House & Martin, 1998), these two skills are essential in addressing issues of educational equity in our schools.

Also, a topic that virtually none of the participants discussed was educational or training factors that impact advocacy. Several of the school counselors in the study did have difficulty articulating their role and defining school counselor advocacy. The missing piece for these participants seems to be graduate education and continuing professional

development on these topics. Professional development was discussed and the school counselors said they have not participated in advocacy or leadership training. This result is different from Field's (2002) findings that formal training along with modeling and mentoring influenced the use of advocacy among participants.

With the exception of Brie, none of the school counselors in the study were exposed to reform models such as the ASCA National Model and the TSCI during their graduate education. She is the only school counselor to describe her graduate school experience and is the school counselor in the study with the fewest years experience. She stated advocacy and leadership along with the use of the ASCA National Model was stressed by her graduate program. She said she is unaware if other school counselors at Branson High School had received this training. However, she believed even if they had not received this training many of her colleagues had been school counselors for many years and were natural advocates. Like other school counselors, she felt training was not necessary to become an effective advocate.

However, theoretical literature (House & Sears, 2002) states school counseling graduate programs have an important role to play in training school counselor advocates and graduate programs have mostly neglected to educate school counselors on issues such as educational reform, systemic change, political climates, and the power structures which exist in schools and communities. Also, the TSCI (The Education Trust, 2003) provides a model for change within school counseling graduate programs which could produce school counselor advocates and leaders who are focused on issues of equity within their schools. In addition, Brown and Trusty's (2005) Advocacy Competencies and the domains of knowledge and skills can be used to effectively train current graduate students as well as offer practicing

school counselors professional development on how to become effective advocates. While advocacy knowledge was not emphasized by the participants, it is believed knowledge and skills are intertwined and that school counselors should possess relevant advocacy knowledge in order to be effective advocates. This lack of advocacy knowledge seemed to be the missing piece for many of these school counselors. They were not comfortable with terms such as advocacy, data, or systemic change, nor did they seem to be aware of the historical context of their role as well as educational systems of promoting inequities in society.

Finally, the current culture of education also impacts advocacy, particularly within this context. There is a movement in society for all students to graduate high school meeting the requirements to attend a four-year college or university. This trend is exhibited clearly by recent legislation in the state of the study which dictates current eighth graders have new graduation requirements. These students will graduate high school with four math credits, three of which will be Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II (“Future-Ready Core Course of Study”, 2007). Even with these new requirements, not all students will be four-year college preparatory, because students must also take a fourth math to meet these requirements. The additional mathematics requirements could improve the success rate of students at community colleges attempting to transfer to a four-year university because they will have a more rigorous mathematics background. In addition, this researcher believes the state will soon require four college preparatory mathematics courses for all students thus making the task of preparing all students for four-year colleges and universities easier. School counselor advocacy will still be needed to empower underrepresented students, but these policy changes could alter the definition of school counselor advocacy in this state.

These graduation requirements will add additional stress on schools to improve test scores. At Adams and Central high schools, they are under tremendous pressure to improve scores. Currently, there is the temptation to route students into Technical Math instead of Geometry and Algebra 2, because Technical Math is not tested. Despite this pressure, the faculty at these two schools seemed to promote the concept of college-for-all students and they are trying to expand their enrollment in upper-level courses which will prepare more students for college. Their beliefs do agree with literature on the topic (Horn et al., 2000), which highlights the connection between the completion of higher levels of mathematics and an increase in four-year college enrollment. Policymakers in the state of the study are likely aware of this research, which may have driven the new graduation requirements.

While participants from Adams High School and Central High School are advocating for an increase in college access, Branson High School is compiling an impressive record of academic achievement among its students. School counselor Bob believes Branson High School is doing an excellent job of preparing many students for college. Bob's claim is substantiated with data because at Branson High School, close to half of the students take honors and Advanced Placement courses and around 80% of the students graduate on the college preparatory graduation track. These data contrasted with Adams and Central high schools where approximately 25% of the students take honors and Advanced Placement courses and around 70% graduate on the college preparatory graduation track. However, all three high schools do offer approximately the same number of Advanced Placement courses as well as opportunities to take college classes while still in high school.

Ironically, at Branson High School, where the student achievement is much higher and they have more students attending college, they seem to believe that not every student could

and should attend a four-year college. They are very disturbed by the new legislation passed by the state and feel they will now have more high school dropouts instead of college enrollees. Despite the fact that achievement for all of their students is important, and their record validated the impressive job they are doing educating their students, the line is more clearly drawn in their school between the students who are college-bound and those that are not college-bound. The participants from Branson High School do not adhere to a college-for-all philosophy, which is why they disagree with the new graduation requirements.

At Adams and Central high schools, where many of their students are at-risk, they carry the belief that all of their students are capable of and should have the opportunity to attend college. This difference in context impacts the definition of school counselor advocacy and the school counselors' disposition to focus their advocacy efforts on underrepresented students. According to Fitch and Marshall (2004), school counselors in low performing schools are more likely to possess a disposition for advocacy. In addition, these findings align with earlier research by Krei and Rosenbaum (2001) which state that many school counselors are encouraging college-for-all students, although some school counselors do believe that each student is different and advocacy efforts and post-secondary plans should be tailored to each individual.

In order to encourage college-for-all students, many of the participants encouraged students to consider the two-year college first, and then transfer to a four-year college or university. While community college may be a legitimate, financially savvy approach to completing a four-degree for some students, for other students it may be a dead end. Transfer rates from two-year colleges to four-year colleges have declined nationally for 30 years (Gordon, 1996). Approximately 22% of community college students in the college transfer

program actually transfer to four-year colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). There are complex reasons for this low transfer rate, some of which are the responsibility of the community college and their transfer programs.

For the purpose of this study, the participants overwhelming emphasis on the two-year colleges align with national statistics. Their emphasis is a concern because low-income and first-generation students are far more likely than their peers to enroll in a community college (Terenzini et al., 2001). Bill's belief that the community college may be the only option for poor students validates this statistic. In addition, students in poverty are less academically prepared to enter a four-year college. However, the wide availability of financial aid for economically disadvantaged students makes a four-year college education attainable for many of these students. Finally, in addition to low-transfer rates, a group of high school seniors were examined five years after high school graduation to study college graduation rates. Of students that began their education at a four-year college, 53% had earned a bachelor's degree. In contrast, only six percent of students that began their education at a two-year college had earned a bachelor's degree (Terenzini et al., 2001). The school counselors in this study were seemingly unaware of these statistics and believed the two-year college was an excellent option. According to the statistics, steering certain groups of underrepresented students in to the community college will make them less likely to attain a four-year degree and perpetuate the current inequities in society. School counselors should emphasize rigorous academic preparation for all students as well as teaching them how to advocate for themselves. These skills will improve college access and graduation rates at all colleges.

This culture of accountability highlights the importance of school counselor advocacy to ensure that none of their students are left behind. Pressure on schools mean many students

and their needs are overlooked for the common good of the school. The conceptual framework provides a model for graduate education and preparing school counselor advocates, but it doesn't address the reality of the wide range of challenges in our schools. In addition, the framework does not provide a model for the actual practice of advocacy. Context could be added to the conceptual framework and school counseling graduate students, along with practicing school counselors, could be trained to assess their personal and professional contexts and to use this assessment to advocate for their students more effectively. The advocacy factors identified in this study could be used in a fourth domain to guide and train school counselors.

### Recommendations

School counselors in this study meet many of the expectations for school counselor advocates outlined in the theoretical literature and conceptual framework; however they tend to advocate only for individuals. They stress the importance of relationships and getting to know students well so they can advocate if needed. The majority of the school counselors do not identify issues of equity in their schools and they do not use data to identify these issues. Also, even though they did discuss collaborating with teachers, administrators, and families, they rarely intervene in the system of the school to promote equity. They could address systemic issues by utilizing data, examining and challenging unfair policies and procedures, and offering professional development for faculty on college access (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Erford et al., 2003; House & Sears, 2002).

In addition, many of the counselors, particularly those at Adams and Central high schools, had difficulty articulating their roles. As addressed in detail in Chapter II, the ASCA

National Model and other models such as the TSCI, could be used to implement programs that address systemic issues and meet the needs of all students by using advocacy, leadership, and collaboration. While not technically models for advocacy, both models stress the use of advocacy to address issues of equity in the school. The ASCA National Model addresses equity by requiring school counselors to conduct equity audits and develop closing the achievement gap action plans. Both models also address the issue of context by stressing the use of data to initially identify the needs of your students.

However, there are several critiques of the National Model. The model does not describe how a school counselor should advocate for their students. In addition, half of the school counselors stressed that advocacy is not something you do for certain students, but something you do for all students. The emphasis of the National Model as well as other comprehensive programs may be partly to blame for this belief. The emphasis on a program that reaches all students has led many school counselors to believe that it is not ethical to focus only on a group of students, even if there are inequities in their school. These participants did not seem to understand that while all students deserve their equal treatment, some inequities do remain in their schools and it is ethically mandated to remove these inequities and advocate for these students. The ASCA National Model could be modified to emphasize the importance of working with all students, while also emphasizing that school counselors should also address systemic and individual inequities. However, implementing the ASCA National Model would help the school counselors to reach all students, while removing some of the barriers they expressed that relate to role confusion. It would enable school counselors to publicize themselves and express to others in the school and community the role of the school counselor.

However, if the school counselors in this study describe advocacy behaviors that do not align with the conceptual framework and the theoretical literature, does this mean they are not advocates? While there are differences between participants and high schools, participants in this study did have consistencies while defining advocacy, describing advocacy behaviors, and detailing factors that impact advocacy. There are many similarities in these interviews across three different high schools. Some of these similarities include the use of empathy, a parental role, communication, collaboration, and barriers such as a lack of time and defining the school counselor's role. School counselors in this study and in other schools have the ability to validate their advocacy efforts even if it does not align with the literature and conceptual framework. Within the context of this study, data can be used to prove the effectiveness of advocacy. School counselors can examine enrollment trends in college preparatory classes, graduation rates on the college preparatory pathway, and enrollment rates in four-year colleges and universities. Positive trends indicate advocacy by school counselors is successful, and by noting negative trends, changes can be made in advocacy efforts as well as the school counseling program to better meet the needs of students.

However, it was anticipated that context would have a greater impact. If the participants in this study are representative of all educators, then the conclusion can be drawn that educators do not allow their personal and professional contexts to impact their decisions and advocacy efforts. While these participants cared and empathized with their students, they did not view themselves as part of an educational system that perpetuates the status quo and current inequities in society. These participants along with other educators should critically examine themselves and their schools in order to create change and be able to effectively advocate for underrepresented students and their families.

### Implications for Leadership

An interesting result of this study was the perspective of the school leaders. Ava and Corey seem to share this new vision of school counselors that is promoted in the current literature. They expect their school counselors to be advocates and leaders and to promote school-wide change. It is unclear if this is due to their personalities or the school at which they are employed. Both high schools are low-performing and have been mandated to change and improve. Every school employee is a part of this change, including the school counselors. However, despite their beliefs they have been unwilling to remove administrative barriers and clerical tasks from their school counselors. Their unwillingness to change can be attributed to their school counselors' role confusion and willingness to complete all assigned tasks.

Conversely, Blake is the principal of a school that he opened. His school is high-performing and has even been identified nationally as a model high school. He has a successful formula in place, and part of this formula is removing administrative responsibilities from school counselors. School administrators can examine Blake's policies and mandate that school counselors spend their time on counseling related tasks. Administrative tasks can be assigned to administrators, and clerical tasks to the appropriate personnel in the school. School counselors at Branson High School did not appear to even participate in typical "fair share" duties such as hall or athletic duty. The school counselors at Branson High School praised this aspect of Blake's leadership style and stated it allowed them to focus on students.

However, Blake is resistant to his school counselors involving themselves in the daily functioning of the school if it does not relate to counseling. He does not believe they should

be using data extensively, involved in the curriculum, or conducting registration. He does not view school counselors as school leaders or advocates for systemic change. He carries a more traditional view of school counselors, as mental health professionals in an academic setting. Professional development for administrators on the evolving role of the school counselor and the ASCA National Model would be beneficial and promote the use of advocacy in the schools.

The school counselors in this study work closely with their school administrators to increase college access for their students. This relationship is most apparent during the course registration process when school administrators and school counselors work hand-in-hand to ensure students are enrolled in courses that are appropriate for their ability and career goals. However, a breakdown can occur when school counselors are encouraging all students to challenge themselves academically and administrators are faced with the difficult task of improving test scores. School counselors and school administrators can work together to identify students who are prepared to take these classes and put supports in place to ensure their success. In addition, policies and procedures can be examined to remove rigid requirements for entry into upper-level courses.

Finally, the school counselors identified one of the barriers to advocacy as themselves. Many are leaders in their school. In the field of school counseling, school counselors are often reticent to take the lead in school reform efforts and become student advocates (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Erford et al., 2003; House & Sears, 2002). Theoretical literature identifies complex reasons for this reticence including inadequate training, conflicting roles and mission, uninformed administrators, pressures within the school and community, and school counselor compliance. School counselors have also been criticized for not creating a clear

vision for their program, which encourages administrators and other school personnel to define the school counseling program (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Erford et al., 2003; House & Sears, 2002).

Data from this study validates many of these barriers. School counselors in this study possess a self-admitted confusion over their role. Several school counselors even have difficulty articulating their role and how they are advocates for students. They admit to allowing other school personnel to define their roles and responsibilities and discussed the school counselor complacency of some of their colleagues. As leaders, school counselors can advocate for themselves and their profession by obtaining advocacy and leadership training as well as training on topics relevant to college access. In addition, they should join local, state, and national organizations designed to educate school counselors and advocate for the profession.

School administrators, after revising the roles and responsibilities of their school counselors, can challenge school counselors to define their own roles. They also can encourage school counselors to publicize their programs and emphasize how school counseling and advocacy impacts students. School counseling programs can become more data-driven to identify needs of students and to illustrate the importance of school counselors. School counseling models (American School Counselor Association, 2003; The Education Trust, 2003); along with theoretical literature on school counselor advocacy (Bemak & Chung, 2005; House & Martin, 1998) stress the importance of data to school counselor advocacy. Two of the school administrators in this study are not even aware of many of the advocacy efforts of their school counselors. This lack of recognition can be due to the advocacy style of some school counselors, which Chelsea described as “passive-aggressive.”

Also, many of the school counselors described advocacy behaviors that are no different from the traditional role of the school counselor, so their administrators do not see their school counselors going above and beyond their traditional duties and advocating for their students.

Student Services directors as well Central Office leaders could advocate for a protection of school counselor's time, and a more concrete job description. Advocating for additional time would only be effective if there are clear expectations of how a school counselor should be allocating their time during the school day and how to best advocate for students. These central office leaders, along with school administrators can also arrange for professional development in areas such as advocacy, leadership, and the ASCA National Model. The school counselors in this study are advocating for students and families and providing an array of services from the dispensation of college information to family support and empowerment and leaders at all levels can provide support to ensure the success of advocacy efforts.

### Significance

Theoretical literature (Bailey et al., 2003; Baker, 2004; Bemak & Chung, 2005; House & Martin, 1998; House & Sears, 2002) and national organizations (American School Counselor Association, 2003; The Education Trust, 2003) are encouraging the use of school counselor advocacy to increase college access for underrepresented students. However, there is a lack of empirically based research on school counselor advocacy (Field, 2002; Field & Baker, 2004).

Literature (Brown & Trusty, 2005) has established guidelines and frameworks for training school counselor advocates. This study examined school counselor's personal

definitions of advocacy as well as factors they believe impact the use of advocacy in the schools within this specific context. In addition, perspectives from administrators and teachers added context to the school counselor's own personal perceptions and perhaps deepened the understanding of factors that affect the practice of school counselor advocacy. Results from this study contributed to the literature base by identifying actual advocacy behaviors being practiced in the schools. School counselors also identified barriers to advocacy as well as factors that encourage the practice of advocacy. This information can be used to improve graduate education as well as professional development for advocacy. In addition, policies, practices, as well as school counseling duties and responsibilities could be modified to encourage the practice of advocacy in our schools.

#### Future Research

This study validates earlier research conducted by Field (2002) as well as theoretical research (Bemak & Chung, 2005; House & Martin, 1998) on the topic of school counselor advocacy. This study goes deeper than Field's research and further defines school counselor advocacy within the context of college access. In addition, this study adds rich detail and provides a picture of the day-to-day practice of school counselor advocates and some of the challenges these school counselors face. This study adds literature on a topic that is currently under-researched.

Further research should be conducted on this topic. This study was conducted in one county in a southeastern state. The study could be expanded by conducting additional research in other locations. For example, results might be different if conducted in a rural school that serves primarily low-income, first-generation students. In addition, all three

schools included in this study were atypical, two being low-performing and one high-performing with a small achievement gap. Research might be conducted in a more typical school that serves a wide variety of students. Different school districts within the same state as well as additional states might show the impact of district and state level policies on school counselor advocacy.

Advocacy could also be studied in additional contexts. This study's focus on college access ensured the participants were focused in their responses; however, it did limit the study to high schools. Additional contexts of advocacy could widen the focus to elementary and middle school counselors while further describing the phenomenon of school counselor advocacy.

Additionally, it is recommended that the conceptual framework by Brown and Trusty (2005) be expanded to include context. The new conceptual framework could be utilized to study school counselor advocates and analyze data. The factors identified in this study provide a starting point for examining context in future studies. These factors are student ability, family barriers, role confusion, and district and state barriers. Because context by its definition is unique in different situations, it is likely that not all of these advocacy factors would apply in further studies and that new advocacy factors would be identified.

Finally, an understanding of advocacy within the context of college access could be deepened by including underrepresented students in the study. According to Gibbons et al. (2006) and Venezia and Kirst (2005), high school students rarely utilized their school counselor for guidance about college and viewed their school counselor as not very helpful. A result of this study indicates school counselors believe they are advocating for students and that they are working to increase college access and share college information with students

and parents. Perhaps students do not have the same perceptions. Gibbons et al. (2006) along with Venezia and Kirst (2005) indicate students may not be receiving the benefits of advocacy.

The students in a future study could answer the question as to why they are not working with their school counselor to reach the goal of college. It could be that school counselors are advocating for students and families, and the students are choosing not to access these services. Conversely, the school counselors may not be as effective as they believe at reaching out to students. Perspectives from students will further define school counselor advocacy from the student's perspective as well as inform the professional practice of school counselors. School counselors could modify their advocacy efforts in order to more effectively serve underrepresented students and their families. Families could also be included in the study. Results from this study as well as future studies will continue to define the phenomenon of school counselor advocacy and add insight into the professional practice of school counselors.

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Appendix A  
Interview Questions for School Counselors

- 1a. How do you define school counselor advocacy?
- 2a. What is advocacy as it relates to increasing access for underrepresented students to attend a four-year college or university? (probe: going above and beyond, advocating for special situations, attacking problems at a systemic level, family advocacy)
- 3a. What dispositions (values, beliefs) do you believe that school counselors need to be an effective advocate to increase college access?
- 4a. Tell me how your personal background and experiences impact your use of advocacy to increase college access, if they do? Probes: what drives you? In a positive or negative way, personality issues?
- 5a. How important do you think advocacy is in increasing college access for your students?
- 6a. What barriers, if any, exist in your school that prevents you from being a better advocate to increase college access for your underrepresented students?
- 7a. In your community?
- 8a. In your school district? Probes: systemic issues, community/student issues, administration, time, roles, etc.
- 9a. What knowledge is essential to being an effective advocate to increase college access in your opinion? (i.e. resources, parameters, dispute resolution, models, systemic change)
- 10a. What skills do you feel are essential for effective advocacy to increase college access? (i.e. communication, collaboration, problem-assessment, problem-solving, organizational skills, self-care)
- 11a. The following functions may be performed by a school counselor in an advocacy role. Tell me how you use these functions, if you do, to increase college access for your students. Probe: Give examples and explain why they do or do not use.
  - I. Challenge low-level coursework as well as rigid requirements for upper-level coursework (i.e. PreAlgebra, Technical Math)
  - II. Empower students by teaching self-help skills (i.e. organization, test taking, study skills, etc.)
  - III. Educate parents and students on how to navigate the school bureaucracy (i.e. prerequisites and waiver policies)
  - IV. Use data to promote systemic change (ex. Disproportionate # of minorities in low-level courses vs. honors, etc.)
  - V. Offer staff development to promote high expectations for all students
  - VI. Any additional functions you would like to add.
- 12a. From your perspective, how is advocacy different from traditional counseling duties, roles and responsibilities?
- 13a. Is there anything else about your counseling practices and/or school policies pertaining to the issues we have discussed that you think I should know but haven't asked about?

Appendix B  
Interview Questions for Administrators and Teachers:

- 1b. How do you define school counselor advocacy?
- 2b. What is advocacy as it relates to increasing access for underrepresented students to attend a four-year college or university? (probe: going above and beyond, advocating for special situations, attacking problems at a systemic level, family advocacy)
- 3b. What dispositions, values, or beliefs do you feel school counselors should possess in order to effectively advocate for increased college access for underrepresented students?
- 4b. How important is advocacy in promoting college access for your students?
- 5b. What barriers, if any, exist in your school that prevents school counselors from being a better advocate for improving college access for your underrepresented students?
- 6b. In your community?
- 7b. In your school district? Probes: systemic issues, community/student issues, administration, time, roles, etc.
- 8b. What knowledge or skills should school counselors possess in order to effectively advocate for improved college access for underrepresented students?
- 9b. The following functions may be performed by a school counselor in an advocacy role. Give examples of how school counselors have used these functions, if they do, to increase college access for your students. Probe: Give examples and talk about why they may or may not be important.
  - I. Challenge low-level coursework as well as rigid requirements for upper-level coursework (i.e. PreAlgebra, Technical Math)
  - II. Empower students by teaching self-help skills (i.e. organization, test taking, study skills, etc.)
  - III. Educate parents and students on how to navigate the school bureaucracy (i.e. prerequisites and waiver policies)
  - IV. Use data to promote systemic change (ex. Disproportionate # of minorities in low-level courses vs. honors, etc.)
  - V. Offer staff development to promote high expectations for all students
  - VI. Any additional functions you would like to add.
- 10b. What specific advocacy behaviors would you like to see more of to improve college access?
- 11b. Is there anything else about counseling practices and/or school policies pertaining to the issues we have discussed that you think I should know but haven't asked about?

## Appendix C

## Letter to Principal Requesting Permission to Conduct Research

Dear Principal,

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership department of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am also a school counselor at Bandys High School in Catawba, NC. I am writing you to request permission to conduct research with school counselor(s) and teacher(s) in your school. I would also like to invite you to be a part of my study.

I am interested in exploring advocacy behaviors of school counselors in your school. Specifically, I am interested in how they advocate for increased college access for students that are traditionally underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities (i.e. minority, economically disadvantaged and first-generation college students). If you choose to participate, I would seek your assistance in arranging interviews with all school counselors that are interested in participating, as well as identifying three or more mathematics teachers. Mathematics teachers are identified because the literature indicates that mathematics may be the subject that determines access to four-year colleges and universities. I would also be interested in learning about your perspective on this topic.

Teachers, school counselors, and administrators that choose to participate will be asked to complete a one hour interview as well as subsequent brief follow-up interviews by phone as needed. Complete confidentiality regarding the school and participants will be maintained by changing the names of all and using a code. Audiotapes and transcripts will be secured by the researcher in a locked filing cabinet and will be available only to me and my dissertation committee. Upon completion and final approval of the research project by the dissertation committee, the transcripts and audiotapes will be destroyed.

I look forward to your response and hope that you choose to participate. I have obtained clearance through the necessary office in [REDACTED] as well as through the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. [REDACTED] is neither sponsoring nor conducting this research and there is no penalty if you choose not to participate. Please feel free to contact me at (850) 418-4571 or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Patrick Akos at (919) 843-4758 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kelly Schaeffer  
Doctoral Student  
UNC-Chapel Hill

## Appendix D

## Invitation to Participate in Study to School Counselors and Teachers

Dear School Counselor or Teacher,

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership department of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am also a school counselor at Bandys High School in Catawba, NC. You have been identified by your principal as a counselor or teacher that is an advocate within your school.

I am interested in exploring advocacy behaviors of the school counselors in your school. Specifically, I am interested in how you advocate for increased college access for students that are traditionally underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities (i.e. minority, economically disadvantaged and first-generation college students). I would be interested in learning more about how you advocate for students, your personal definition of advocacy, and what factors impact your use of advocacy.

Teachers, school counselors, and administrators that choose to participate will be asked to complete a one hour interview as well as subsequent brief follow-up interviews by phone as needed. The interviews will be taped but only for my own research purposes. The tapes will be erased after they are transcribed and you are given a pseudonym.

Complete confidentiality regarding the school and participants will be maintained by changing the names of all and using a code. Audiotapes and transcripts will be secured by the researcher in a locked filing cabinet and will be available only to me and my dissertation committee. Anything you say to me will be completely confidential. Upon completion and final approval of the research project by the dissertation committee, the transcripts and audiotapes will be destroyed. Let me add that you are under no obligation to participate, as [REDACTED] is neither sponsoring nor directing this research. Your position will not be harmed in any way if you choose not to participate.

I look forward to your response and hope that you choose to participate. I have obtained clearance through the necessary office in [REDACTED] as well as through the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Please feel free to contact me at (850) 418-4571 or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Patrick Akos at (919) 843-4758 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kelly Schaeffer  
Doctoral Student  
UNC-Chapel Hill

Appendix E  
Letter to School District Requesting Access

[REDACTED]

Dr. [REDACTED]:

I am writing to request permission to conduct my dissertation research in [REDACTED]. I am currently a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In addition, I am a school counselor at Bandys High School in Catawba, North Carolina and served as the counseling department chair and AVID director at [REDACTED] from 2002 until 2005.

The topic of my dissertation is school counselor advocacy. My focus is on how school counselors advocate for students that are traditionally underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities. The dissertation is qualitative in nature and I would like to interview school counselors, mathematics teachers, and the principal from two to three high schools in Cumberland County. I am including mathematics teachers because math is often the subject that determines access as well as success in higher education. The principal is included because their leadership often drives the role and responsibilities of school counselors.

I am scheduled to defend my dissertation proposal in early October. After my defense, my proposal will be submitted to the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I would need preliminary approval from [REDACTED] before submitting my request to UNC Chapel Hill. I would like to conduct my research in [REDACTED] during the month of March.

This is a formal request to conduct research in your school district. I would be more than happy to address questions or concerns you may have in addition to possible sites for my research. I have identified three schools: [REDACTED] as possible sites. I am including my contact information. I look forward to speaking with you further about the possibilities of conducting my doctoral research in [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Kelly Schaeffer  
Doctoral Student, UNC Chapel Hill  
Contact Information:  
[kgilbert@email.unc.edu](mailto:kgilbert@email.unc.edu)

(850) 418-4571  
249 Stewart Rock Rd  
Stony Point, NC 28678

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