Fulfilling the college promise: Moving from access to completion for second-year promise students at Long Beach City College

by

Nohel Corral

B.A., University of California Santa Barbara, 2004
M.S., California State University Long Beach, 2007

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

This study examined whether a significant relationship existed between participation in the college promise program and student persistence, success, and completions at Long Beach City College (LBCC) through a Completion by Design framework. Participants for this study included college promise program students from cohort years 2013, 2014, and 2015 with a control group identified using propensity score matching. The intent of this study was to identify whether an association existed between participation in the LBCC college promise program and student progress and completion. The results suggested that college promise program students were more likely to persist than non-college promise program students. However, non-college promise program students were more likely to have higher GPAs, more units completed, and complete certificates, degrees, and/or transfer than their college promise program peers. These results suggest that providing students with supports only upon connection with and entry to the college may not be enough to improve long-term student success outcomes.

Keywords: long beach city college, college promise, financial aid, student persistence, student completions

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Approved by:

Major Professor
George R. Boggs, Ph.D.

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Acknowledgements

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, José D. Corral and Dolores C. Corral. You have taught me to dream big, the importance of education, hard work, and helping others. I will forever be thankful and grateful for the sacrifices you made in raising four boys and encouraging us to succeed.

Chapter 1 -- Introduction

American community colleges have long stood for opportunity and open access to all members of society. According to Boggs (2012), community colleges respond to the needs of the community by developing programs and curricula that support labor market demand. To this effect, community colleges have been vehicles for upward social mobility and economic growth in the communities they serve. Completion of a college degree benefits students, local economies, and society as a whole (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). To illustrate, as students' technical skills and knowledge grow through job and technical training, they often obtain certificates and degrees, which lead to higher wages in the workforce. Additionally, Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2013) indicated that by the year 2020, most of the jobs in our economy will have minimum qualifications that are above a high school diploma. Specifically, 65% of employers in the United States will be seeking to hire individuals with a postsecondary degree or training.

In 2015, President Obama proposed America's College Promise and other completion initiatives to jumpstart a national commitment to be the global leader in higher education by setting a goal for the year 2020 to increase the number of college graduates by five million (Obama, 2009). This call to action has led to a nationwide priority to increase community college persistence and completion of certificates, degrees, and transfers to four-year institutions to address gaps in current and future labor force needs. However, according to the Lumina Foundation (2017b), concerns have been raised about the nation's ability to increase the number of degrees and certificates in comparison to other countries. If American community colleges cannot increase completions, the American economy will have significantly more demand for jobs than supply of skilled workers. Additionally, to remain a global competitor in postsecondary

education, a lack of college affordability has established a sense of urgency to address college completion.

The issue of college affordability has brought forth the development of tuition-free programs in community colleges to better support college accessibility for students. However, other expenses to attend college, such as cost of living, textbooks, and transportation, account for a significant financial responsibility for students and their families (Lumina Foundation, 2017a). Colleges have begun to address college affordability, as a means to address long-term completion challenges, through tuition-free college promise programs. With a primary focus on increasing access and with the ultimate goal of increasing completions, college promise programs have provided first-year financial support to thousands of students entering community college throughout the country. Of over 300 college promise programs that are in existence throughout 44 states, 75 of them exist in California (Kanter, 2018; Regional Educational Laboratory West, 2019).

The purpose of this study is to identify whether a significant relationship existed between participation in the college promise program and student persistence, success, and completions at LBCC through a Completion by Design framework.

Statement of the Problem

Despite changes to the federal government's administration, the focus on completions and persistence inspired states and philanthropic organizations to assist in increasing the attainment of postsecondary credentials. Philanthropic organizations, such as the Lumina Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, have invested a significant amount of resources to assist in students' degree attainment and college completion. The Lumina Foundation "has focused on increasing access and success for all students" (Lumina Foundation,

2017b, p. 2) since its establishment. According to the Lumina Foundation (2017b), the current higher education system is not structured in a way that enables a large number of students, especially historically underserved populations, to complete and earn a college degree. This is where the Lumina Foundation's "big goal 2025" seeks to address the low persistence and completion rates of students in higher education. Specifically, the foundation established a goal to increase the number of Americans with a postsecondary degree or credential to 60% by the year 2025 (Lumina Foundation, 2017b). By increasing the number of Americans with a postsecondary degree to 60%, this will yield approximately 5.9 million students with postsecondary credentials by the year 2025, similar to what Obama set out to accomplish by the year 2020. With more degrees earned, the United States will be a global competitor and ensure a skilled workforce is in place for the demand employers will be seeking.

Similar to the Lumina Foundation, in 2013 Tennessee Governor Haslam spearheaded the "drive to 55" with a goal of increasing the number of postsecondary certificates and degrees in the state of Tennessee to at least 55% by the year 2025. This effort helped establish the Tennessee promise to allow high school graduates to attend community colleges tuition-free (Office of the Governor, 2018). "Drive to 55" is an example of how states are making significant reforms in public higher education, increasing the pipeline to a trained workforce and a better economy.

As a completion agenda initiative, college promise programs are increasingly being established across the nation to assist with college access and opportunities to earn credentials that assist with employability and upward social mobility. While college promise programs have assisted in getting students into college by providing financial support with an ultimate goal of increasing completions, little research has been conducted to determine whether these programs

do indeed support student persistence and completion. Early adopters of college promise programs have historically focused on access and increasing college attendance rates.

A few colleges were early adopters of college promise programs, including Kalamazoo College in Michigan, as well as Ventura College and Long Beach City College (LBCC) in California. The purpose of the Kalamazoo Promise, as well as the Ventura College Promise that was modeled after it, is to enhance the local economy by drawing in families to the district, as well as to increase the number of students enrolling in and graduating from these colleges (Bartik, Hershbein, & Lachowska, 2015; Jameson-Meledy, 2016). A key aspect of these initial promises is the removal of financial barriers to enrollment through place-based scholarships (i.e., scholarships for local unified school district students). Both programs have shown increases in persistence and completion, according to research conducted on their promise cohorts (Bartik et al., 2015; Callahan, 2010; Jameson-Meledy, 2016; Pierce, 2015).

Long Beach City College officially launched its college promise program in 2008 through the establishment of a strong collaboration with Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) and California State University, Long Beach (CSULB). As a part of the program, students graduating from LBUSD high schools receive their first semester of college at LBCC free and a second semester paid for if they meet certain criteria (Inside Higher Ed, 2015). Similar to other college promise programs, LBCC's place-based scholarship has focused primarily on student access to the college and not on persistence or completion of a postsecondary credential.

Long Beach City College has experienced decreased student persistence in recent years, which has led to an increased focus on persistence research at the college. In 2017, LBCC conducted a survey of 4,600 students who were enrolled at the college in the fall of 2016 but did not register or take courses during the following term (Office of Institutional Effectiveness,

2017). Results of this survey showed that 42% of respondents did not return to the college due to personal or financial reasons. Additionally, 30% of respondents indicated that they did not enroll at the college due to course offerings and class scheduling conflicts.

Presently, the LBCC College Promise program focuses primarily on student connection to and entry into the institution through first-year supports. First-year supports include the use of multiple measures to place students into higher-level English, math, and reading courses, priority registration, and through the awarding of place-based scholarships. While other early adopters of college promise programs have found evidence that their programs have led to increased success, persistence, and completion, LBCC has found that college promise program students complete at the same rate as non-promise students (Bartik et al., 2015; Callahan, 2010; Jameson-Meledy, 2016; Pierce, 2015). To this end, research at LBCC has primarily focused on student connection to, entry into, and to some extent, completion at the college. There has yet to be an examination of student loss and momentum points as promise students progress along their educational journeys while at LBCC.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify whether a significant relationship existed between participation in the college promise program and student persistence, success, and completions at Long Beach City College (LBCC) through a Completion by Design framework. With a national and local college promise focus on access, entry, and financial support, the intent of this study was to identify whether an association existed between participation in the LBCC college promise program and student progress (i.e., fall-to-fall persistence, number of units completed, and grade point average) and completion (i.e., completion of a certificate, degree, or

transfer). Specifically, this study examined whether LBCC college promise program students persisted, succeeded, and completed at higher rates than non-college promise program students.

To address the purpose of this study, a non-college promise program student comparison group was identified. Specifically, a comparison group of first-time, full-time students with comparable demographics (e.g., age, ethnicity, gender) was defined and utilized.

Significance of the Study

This study aims to inform existing college promise program practices and the development of future college promise programs by viewing these programs through a completion lens. National research shows the need to have intentional efforts and resources focused on persistence and completion for community college students. While financial assistance as an access intervention is critical for first-time students attending college, ensuring students continue their momentum through key milestones in their educational journey is just as, if not more, important to student success. This study is intended to help inform literature on college promise programs and completions through the use of Long Beach City College longitudinal data.

It would be advantageous for newly established and long-standing college promise programs to look beyond only making college accessible for students, to making student success a fundamental priority through assessing loss and momentum points that these students experience. The Bill and Melinda Gates success initiative, Completion by Design, has established the loss/momentum framework providing a conceptual approach to the student experience with institutions (Rassen, Chaplot, Jenkins, & Johnstone, 2013). Applying this framework, researchers can analyze loss and momentum points through a college promise program student's experience as they progress and complete at an institution. Although the

framework identifies four distinct phases including connection, entry, progress, and completion, the focus of this study will be on the progress and completion aspects of the college promise, as these are two identified gaps that exist in the literature.

Historically, the success of many college promise programs stems from increasing access to college through making college affordable. However, there is an opportunity to identify loss and momentum points that exist as students progress to avoid perpetuating historically low completion rates. With the focus on momentum points, there is an imperative to fundamentally and positively change the rate at which students are completing postsecondary awards, closing the global gap of credentials awarded. Without an intentional focus on student persistence and completions, little change in credentials awarded, graduations, transfers, and employability will occur for college promise program students.

By looking at the longitudinal data for college promise program students at Long Beach City College, the results could inform the establishment or enhancement of college promise programs at other colleges.

Design of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify whether a significant relationship existed between participation in the college promise program and student persistence, success, and completions at Long Beach City College (LBCC) through a Completion by Design framework. The study was conducted at Long Beach City College, an urban community college with a predominantly Hispanic student population (i.e., 55% Hispanic for the 2018-2019 academic year; Long Beach City College, 2019). To address the purpose of the study and to answer the research questions, an external research request was submitted to LBCC. Access to a student dataset for the 2013, 2014, and 2015 college promise program cohorts and a non-college promise program

student comparison group (e.g., students' overall grade point averages, total units completed, first-time full-time enrollments, fall-to-fall persistence, demographic information) was requested. This quantitative study used a descriptive nonexperimental research design. The independent variable in this study was student participation in LBCC's College Promise program. The dependent variables in this study were fall-to-fall persistence rates, grade point average (GPA), units completed by end of the second year, and whether or not the students completed within three years (i.e., earned a certificate, associate's degree, or transferred to a four-year institution).

To assess if there is a significant difference between the independent variable (i.e., student participation in the college promise program) and the dependent variables (i.e., student fall-to-fall persistence and completion), a chi-squared analysis was used (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Furthermore, to determine if a significant difference exists between college promise program and non-college promise program student grade point averages and units completed, an independent t-test was used.

Conceptual Framework

The Completion by Design loss/momentum framework is the conceptual framework for this study and focuses on the key stages of a student's path to successful completion of community college. The ultimate goal of Completion by Design is to increase the number of community college completions at scale while keeping the cost of community college attendance low (i.e., to ensure community colleges remain open access) and also maintaining high quality programs (Rassen et al., 2013).

Completion by Design's loss/momentum framework provided a conceptual approach to the student experience. The framework includes four distinct phases (i.e., connection, entry, progress, completion) to help colleges identify where students meet their greatest obstacles to

persistence and completion (Completion by Design, 2013). Within these four phases, students engage with the institution, and each engagement can either boost a student's momentum toward college persistence and completion or deter a student from continuing with courses and college altogether (Rassen et al., 2013).

Research Questions

RQ1: Does participation in the college promise program influence fall-to-fall student persistence rates?

Research question one was posed to help identify whether differences in persistence rates exist between college promise program students and non-college promise program students. With rapidly growing numbers of college promise programs in California and throughout the country, intentional efforts can be focused on persistence.

RQ2: Does participation in the college promise program influence grade point averages and units completed for second-year students?

Research question two was asked to identify whether differences in the dependent variables of GPA and units completed exist between college promise program students and non-college promise program students at the end of their second year. This analysis can help inform the data analyzed on fall-to-fall persistence that is examined in question one.

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in completions (i.e., certificates, degrees, transfers) between college promise program students and non-college promise program students?

Very little information exists on completions of students who participated in college promise programs. Many college promise programs are fairly new and have been established within the last three years. Few colleges have longitudinal data to track completions of college

promise program participants. This question is intended to help inform the literature on college promise programs and completions.

Limitations

One limitation includes the generalizability of the findings in this study. For this study, the researcher analyzed data for only one college promise program. It is possible that the experiences of second-year college promise program students at other colleges are different from the students examined in this study.

Assumption

A main assumption in the study is that the student-level data provided by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness at Long Beach City College are reliable, accurate, and representative of college promise program students at the college.

Definition of Terms

Completion: The term completion is used when a first-time, full-time student has successfully completed the necessary requirements for a certificate, degree, or transfer within a three-year time frame to a four-year institution (Community College Research Center, 2018).

Completion rates: A percentage calculation of all students in the cohort who completed the necessary requirements for a certificate, degree, or transfer divided by the total number of students in the specified cohort.

Grade point average (GPA): Grade point average is the number representing the average value of the accumulated final grades earned in courses (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). For the purposes of this study, students' GPAs for their first and second year have been combined.

Fall-to-fall persistence: First-time, full-time student enrollment from initial fall term to second fall term.

Place-based scholarships: Scholarships for local unified school district students.

Units completed: Total number of units successfully completed at the end of two academic years beginning with the first fall term of a student's enrollment at LBCC.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 gives the reader an introduction to and foundation for this study. In Chapter 2, the first sections include a review of the literature on the national movement to increase completions, a description of the completion agenda, and a description of the college promise program as an initiative of focus. Following these sections, a conceptual framework of Completion by Design using the loss/momentum framework is highlighted. In chapter 3, the research design and methodology used to conduct this study are outlined. Chapter 4 includes the statistical analyses of the data collected, the results of the study, and findings. Lastly, chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, discussion of the findings, implications for higher education and college promise program efforts, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to identify whether a significant relationship existed between participation in the college promise program and student persistence, success, and completions at Long Beach City College (LBCC) through a Completion by Design framework. To theoretically place this study within the existing body of literature on the completion agenda and college promise initiatives, this literature review is organized into five parts. To illustrate the national movement on increasing completions, a description of the completion agenda, featuring the inception, issues at hand, and the college promise as an initiative of focus are described. Following these sections, a theoretical and conceptual framework of Completion by Design's loss/momentum framework is introduced. This framework will provide a lens by which the literature on national, state, and local college promise program initiatives is highlighted.

Statement of the Problem

Community colleges have a long history of being vehicles for social and economic upward mobility for local communities in the United States. American community colleges have long stood for opportunity and access to all members of society. To this end, community colleges are referred to as "Democracy's College[s]" or "America's Colleges" (Boggs, 2012). According to Boggs (2012), community colleges respond to the needs of the community by developing programs and curricula that support local labor market demand.

In 2015, President Barack Obama introduced America's College Promise, inspiring the development of college promise programs nationwide. With a primary focus on access, college promise programs have provided financial support to thousands of students throughout the country. Over 25% of college promise programs currently exist in California (Smith, 2017). With efforts primarily focused on first-year financial supports and an emphasis on relationships with

partnering unified school districts and four-year colleges and universities, community colleges have an opportunity to consider a student's journey through connection, entry, progress, and completion in assessing data and the need for additional targeted supports.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify whether a significant relationship existed between participation in the college promise program and student persistence, success, and completions at Long Beach City College (LBCC) through a Completion by Design framework.

Since the Obama administration announced the American Graduation Initiative (AGI) in 2009, the United States has made a commitment to regain its place in the global race in higher education by setting a goal to increase the number of college graduates by five million by 2020 (Obama, 2009). According to Obama (2009), the AGI was designed to build on the strengths that community colleges afford students through new innovations for today's economy. Additionally, philanthropic organizations such as the Lumina Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have set significant goals to increase completions despite the transition in the federal government's administration. For example, the Lumina Foundation set a goal to increase postsecondary completions (i.e., certificate and degree completions) by 60% by the year 2025. This is 20% higher than its initial benchmark at the onset of its efforts (Nailos & Borden, 2014). The Lumina Foundation (2018a) noted that to remain competitive in the global economy and to continue to provide the opportunity for social and economic mobility, education beyond a high school diploma is critical. This organization has stated that the key to achieving the goal of an increase in completions by 60% is the closure of achievement gaps by race and ethnicity in the community college system.

In order to increase completions nationally, community colleges will need to address their challenges. First, changes in nationwide demographics and the economy must be addressed in order for social and economic upward mobility to occur. According to the Lumina Foundation (2018b), concerns have been raised about the nation's ability to increase the number of degrees and certificates in comparison to other countries, which may lead to American economic sectors having more demand for skilled workers than there is supply. In addition to being a global competitor in degrees awarded, college affordability and the increased debt accumulated by students have led to a sense of urgency to address college completion.

The issue of college affordability has brought forth the development of tuition-free programs in community colleges to better support college accessibility for students, particularly low-income students. However, other expenses to attend college such as cost of living, textbooks, and transportation account for a significant financial responsibility for students and their families. A recommended approach to providing tuition-free programs to enhance access and completions includes processes that are transparent and that have a clearly defined goal and benefit, as well as resources and supports that are made readily available to students (Lumina Foundation, 2017a).

The National Persistence and Completion Landscape

Persistence in college and timely completion of a certificate or associate's degree is critical for students to progress through and complete in a timely fashion. Research shows that the three-year community college persistence rate for first-time college students is 57% nationwide (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). In comparison, the persistence rate for first-time students who start their postsecondary education at a four-year college or university is 80%.

In a similar study, completion rates for community college students are considerably different when compared to students starting at a four-year public institution. According to Ginder, Kelly-Reid, and Mann (2017), only 29% of community college students complete their programs of study within four years, or within 200% of normal time to a degree compared to 61% of students who start at four-year universities and complete within 200% of normal time to a degree.

With studies showing low national averages in persistence and completion rates, community colleges must look beyond getting students into college and focus on affordability. Community colleges must look to build on partnerships with community and local unified school districts, consider the multiple loss points students may encounter, and find strategies that encourage momentum throughout their college experience.

Recent Community College Reform Efforts

Major national community college completion reform efforts have been implemented to address the issue of low persistence and completions among community colleges. Initiatives such as Achieving the Dream, Completion by Design, and Complete College America have spearheaded completion reform in America's community colleges. In addition, states moving to a performance-based funding formula have required community colleges to respond to the need to increase student persistence and completions.

Achieving the Dream. Achieving the Dream (ATD) is a Lumina Foundation funded initiative that assists in the improvement of institutional outcomes by addressing issues of student remediation, term-to-term persistence rates, and program completion rates (Baily, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). Participating institutions receive assistance from ATD to support the use of institutional data and the creation of a culture of evidence. Achieving the Dream

leadership and data coaches assist colleges in identifying barriers to student success and require that participating institutions make a commitment to reform the student experience to improve student success and achievement through a culture of evidence (Baily et al., 2015). The five organizational improvement practices that ATD uses as a framework at the colleges they work with include: commitment from the leadership; use of data to prioritize interventions; active engagement by stakeholders; implementation, evaluation, and improvement strategies; and, establishment of a continuous improvement infrastructure (Baily et al., 2015).

Completion by Design. Completion by Design was a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funded effort that focused on community college completion efforts in Florida, Ohio, and North Carolina. The intent of this initiative was to identify pathways by which students would be more likely to succeed. Through a loss/momentum framework, institutions identified the engagement students have with their respective colleges and supported the enhancement of students' educational momentum. At the same time, institutions identified the loss points and barriers to student persistence and completion. According to Baily et al. (2015), institutional researchers assisted these colleges in tracking first-time student cohorts in order to locate loss points students may have experienced in their paths and momentum points that could inform students' pathways and their likelihood of completion.

Complete College America. Complete College America (CCA) has worked with more than 30 states to help increase the number of students who earn a certificate or degree. One of its staple interventions is improving student persistence by providing remedial course sequences with a co-requisite course that accelerates students' time to completion of transfer-level education (i.e., avoiding the multiple loss points in remedial education sequences through the pairing of transfer-level courses with co-requite courses offering additional supports for students;

Baily et al., 2015). This model includes a high level of intensive in-class student support, as well as a co-requisite section aligned with a learning facilitation approach to teaching. In addition to the co-requisite model, CCA has partnered with other organizations in support of completion efforts in postsecondary education. For example, in partnership with the College Promise campaign and Achieving the Dream, the three organizations published an online open access resource (i.e., Promise with a Purpose) in a joint effort to gather and share best practices through an intentional framework for student success. Through this framework, all three organizations advocate for states, cities, and community colleges to include a completion-oriented framework in college promise programs that are created throughout the country (Complete College America, 2018).

Performance-based funding. Nationally, as states move to a performance-based funding formula model, community colleges are facing fewer financial resources and a need to focus their efforts to increase completions. There has been support in recent years for community college funding formulas to include success metrics as a determinate for funding, as these metrics are intended to address achievement gaps by increasing equity and sustainability, as well as encouraging collaboration across constituent groups to build buy-in for change at an institution (Altstadt, Fingerhut, & Kazis, 2012). Altstadt et al. (2012) recommended strategies for an effective transition to a performance-based funding formula, which includes: rewarding not only completions but progress metrics, transparent communication to protect those students who are most academically and educationally vulnerable, garnering buy-in from constituent groups (e.g., in California, AB 1725 requires faculty consultation in the areas of governance and budget; Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2013), and recognizing that implementing

a change of this magnitude requires a slow transition with clear outcomes and predictable changes.

America's College Promise

The benefits of completing a certificate or degree provide an invaluable contribution to students' own lives and to society as a whole (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). For instance, as students' job skills increase through education and students obtain certificates or degrees, they have been found to earn higher wages in the workforce and experience a higher quality of life. Carnevale et al. (2013) indicated that by 2020, the majority of jobs in the United States economy will require a credential beyond high school. Specifically, 65% of employers in the country will be seeking to hire individuals who have a postsecondary degree or training. Moreover, community colleges are designed to serve their surrounding communities and are uniquely positioned to address labor market needs. To help with the increased demand for higher education in the labor market, as well as to increase the number of completions, a recent initiative known as the college promise has gained traction among community colleges as they work to further expand access to college, eliminate financial barriers for students, and increase student success.

In 2015, President Barack Obama announced a plan to reduce the cost of community colleges for students during their first two years of school. President Obama's America's College Promise (ACP) would make community college tuition-free for students who are responsible in their education (e.g., students maintain good academic standing, satisfactory progress toward completion). This would not only cover the tuition for the first half of a bachelor's degree (i.e., two years of college), but it would also provide free access to students who seek to improve job skills for success in the workforce (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). President Obama's

ACP was intended to be a first-dollar scholarship, meaning that the scholarship is given prior to any other type of financial aid. As such, the first-dollar scholarship would allow students to apply for other types of financial aid (e.g., Pell Grants, loans, scholarships) to cover costs such as living expenses, transportation, and supplies. The ACP financial support was intended to increase the number of students who enroll in higher education and shorten the time to completion for degree attainment. Molly Corbett Broad, President of the American Council on Education, commented on President Obama's proposal as being a "game-changer" that would encourage millions of additional students to apply and enroll in college (American Council on Education, 2015). The ACP would have enabled the first four terms or two years of community college coursework to be free for responsible students (The White House, 2015). This would assist students in completing up to 50% of the required coursework for a baccalaureate degree at little to no cost to the students. At the time, the White House estimated that students taking 12 or more units would save approximately $4,000 a year in fees and tuition (The White House, 2015). Despite the change in administration, states have continued efforts to partner with local organizations to create local college promise programs.

Early Adopters of the College Promise

College promise scholarships and free college benefits students by increasing their access to higher education. A few colleges were early adopters of college promise programs, with two notable early adopters being Kalamazoo College in Michigan and Ventura College in California.

The Kalamazoo Promise. In 2006, Kalamazoo College in Michigan launched its Kalamazoo promise providing scholarships for student graduates from Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS) who reside within the district and have been continuously enrolled from kindergarten to 12th grade. Similar to America's College Promise, the Kalamazoo promise is a

first-dollar scholarship. However, the major difference from other scholarships is that this aid is place-based, meaning that the aid has no restrictions on merit criteria (e.g., grade point average, assessment scores, income levels; Niemeyer, 2015). Bartik et al. (2015) noted that the amount of aid given to students is also based on the number of years they have been enrolled in the KPS system. These funds have been made possible by private and anonymous donations. The purpose of the Kalamazoo promise is to enhance the local economy by drawing in families to the district as well as increasing the number of students enrolling in and completing at Kalamazoo College (Bartik et al., 2015). One of the unique aspects of the Kalamazoo promise is that fees and tuition are paid for at any public two-year college or four-year university in the state of Michigan (Niemeyer, 2015).

   Student success in Kalamazoo. As the first college to implement a college promise program, Kalamazoo College has tracked its students for an extensive period of time, and its longitudinal data support an increase in student success for students receiving the college promise program scholarship. For instance, students who receive the college promise program scholarship are more likely to enroll in college and attempt more credits. In addition, Bartik et al. (2015) found that six years post high school graduation, 48% of KPS students who received the college promise program scholarship successfully completed a certificate compared to 36% of their non-promise receiving peer comparison group. They also found that students receiving the scholarship were 33% more likely to complete a four-year degree than their non-promise peer group.

   College promise program students who graduated from Kalamazoo public schools and enrolled at a four-year college have also been found to attempt a higher number of credits. Specifically, Bartik et al. (2015) noted that college promise program students attempt six more

units (i.e., two courses) on average than their non-promise peers. This six-unit increase is equal to a 34% increase from the comparison group for students of color, while white students did not see an increase in additional units attempted. Overall, the Kalamazoo college promise program has led to increases in student enrollment, units attempted and completed, degree attainment, and four-year college attendance for student participants.

Ventura college promise. Similar to Kalamazoo College, Ventura College (VC) in California first announced its intent to launch a college promise program in 2006. The VC college promise program was modeled after Kalamazoo College's program in an effort to increase access and enrollment from their surrounding community, as well as to make college more affordable by removing financial barriers to enrollment (Jameson-Meledy, 2016). With college being tuition-free, the VC promise provides an opportunity to strengthen the local Ventura economy by increasing degree attainment and the skills of the local labor force (Harrison, 2014). The VC promise serves all recent Ventura County high school graduates, or students who have graduated within the last 12 months, with a place-based scholarship.

Student success in Ventura. Ventura College has experienced increases in student success with the implementation of their college promise program (Jameson-Meledy, 2016). For example, of the students in the initial college promise program cohort (n = 80), 88% persisted from the fall to spring semester, and 68% enrolled in the following fall semester. In comparison, only 44% of its non-college promise program comparison group peers persisted during the same time period. This notable difference in persistence reflects the impact the college promise program may have had on students receiving the scholarship in Ventura.

Moreover, a recent analysis of Ventura college promise program student data found that college promise program students enrolled in more credits and transferred to four-year colleges

in larger numbers than their peers. Specifically, out of 1,100 fall 2015 VC college promise program students, 82% attempted 12 units or more, compared to 46% of the general student body (Jameson-Meledy, 2016). In addition, VC college promise program students have been found to complete certificates and degrees at higher rates than their non-promise peers. For example, VC college promise program students completed 58% more degrees and certificates compared to their non-college promise program peer comparison group. VC college promise program students' persistence from their first to second year was also found to be 50% higher than non-college promise program first to second year persistence at VC (Callahan, 2010; Pierce, 2015). In addition, through an examination of demographic data, Jameson-Meledy (2016) found that Hispanic students in the VC college promise program earn degrees and certificates at a 10% higher rate than Hispanic students not participating in the college promise program.

California's College Promise

Similar to the nationwide job forecast, two-thirds of California's job market is expected to require at least two years of postsecondary education (Bohn, 2014). However, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), the average cost of tuition and fees charged to full-time students enrolled in public two-year institutions has increased by approximately 31% from 2009 to 2015. With the cost of college increasing, the need to keep higher education affordable and accessible to students has never been greater. California college promise programs seek to address this issue of affordability and access. Regional Educational Laboratory West at WestEd (2016) highlights the onboarding of 16 new California college promise programs in 2016. In 2019, 75 active programs now exist in California (Regional Educational Laboratory West, 2019). Of the 114 California community colleges, many continue to make the commitment to develop and implement a college promise program.

With the vast growth in college promise programs, especially in California, more longitudinal data will need to be collected and analyzed to assess the effectiveness of these new programs. Particular focus will need to be placed on tracking cohorts, interventions, and appropriate comparison groups of students who are not enrolled in college promise programs (Regional Educational Laboratory West, 2016). In addition to data collection, a barrier that institutions will have to address is identifying funding to implement college promise programs at their institutions. Although funding was not provided at the federal level through America's College Promise, much of the funding explored in this literature review came from donors and collaborations through philanthropic organizations and foundations. For a college promise program to be implemented, colleges will need to fundraise, seek additional revenue streams that can support student fees and materials, and have a strong relationship with their foundations.

California College Promise initiative: Assembly bill 19. With the increased development of college promise programs in California, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office has formalized efforts to support these programs through the passing of state legislation. The state of California recently committed to formalizing the California College Promise through Assembly Bill 19 (AB 19). With the passing of this bill, the Chancellor of the California community college system will distribute funding to each of the 114 community colleges in California that meet specific requirements and policy goals to waive fees for one academic year for first-time students who are enrolled in 12 or more semester units. An additional requirement will be that students submit either a free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) or a California Dream Act application (California Legislative Information, 2017) to qualify for this program. It is also important to note that community colleges must opt into and comply with federal student loan participation on or after January 1, 2019 for eligibility to

receive California College Promise funds through AB19 (California Legislative Information, 2017).

With the recent passage of AB 19, the California College Promise initiative will contribute to a stronger college-going culture, participation in training programs, and enrollment into degree attainment pathways that can increase social and economic upward mobility. According to the Visalia Times Delta (2017), the goal of this new assembly bill is to increase the number of students moving from high school to college, reduce time to completion, reduce developmental education courses, increase the number of students earning certificates or degrees that meet labor market demand, and increase the number of students who transfer to four-year colleges and universities.

California leads the country's total number of active college promise programs with 75 (Regional Educational Laboratory West, 2019). Not all institutions with college promise programs have standardized requirements or components to their respective programs. However, college promise programs are typically comprised of financial support in the form of scholarships, while others offer a type of first-year experience (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2017a).

California College Promise grant. In addition to California's college promise initiative, the Chancellor of the California community colleges has successfully encouraged the Board of Governors to rename the Board of Governors fee waiver (i.e., a type of state aid that has been offered in California for more than 30 years) to the California College Promise Grant (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2017b). Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley recently stated that community colleges in California have waived tuition for students through the system office to provide support for those who cannot afford college. Chancellor Oakley highlighted that more

than one million students currently receive assistance under what is the largest free tuition initiative in the country.

Similar to what former President Barack Obama set out to do with America's College Promise, Chancellor Oakley aligned what the state of California has done for years with the college promise (i.e., offer tuition-free college education to students who cannot afford college). This first dollar award is applied to a student's financial aid package before any other type of aid. This is what separates the California College Promise grant from college promise programs in other states. By making college affordable and connecting the successful partnership model of college promises through this grant, the Chancellor hopes to send a message to Californians that college is accessible and attainable, as well as emphasize that there is support from the state for students to receive a higher education (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2017b).

California College Promise innovation grant. Adding to the suite of California college promise programs and initiatives, there is Assembly Bill 1741. This bill established the California College Promise innovation grant program, providing funds to community colleges implementing new or expanding existing college promise programs in California. When thinking about college promise programs in general, these programs align unified school districts, community colleges, and public four-year universities to provide clear roadmaps for students as they pursue their educational goals. Effective college promise programs improve college readiness, access, and completion for students who participate. During the 2016-2017 fiscal year, $15 million was disbursed to grant applicants (Lawrence, 2017).

Access, completion, and the California College Promise. With the mission of community colleges shifting from student access to successful completion both nationally and

locally within the state of California, California community colleges will need to balance state-level promise program funding that primarily incentivizes college access with local supports to ensure persistence and timely completion. While Ventura College and out-of-state Kalamazoo College both have established college promise programs with data that shows evidence of not only increased access, but also increased success, persistence, and completion, this is not yet evident for other California community colleges developing and implementing college promise programs, many of which vary in requirements and components for their programs (Bartik et al., 2015; California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2017a; Callahan, 2010; Pierce, 2015). Colleges implementing college promise programs must develop them through the intentional use of data, including success metrics and cohort tracking, to measure student progress and success.

The Long Beach College Promise Program

Long Beach City College (LBCC) has received many accolades at the national, state, and local levels for the work the college has done with the Long Beach College Promise program and the promise pathways first-year experience program. Long Beach City College officially launched its 2008 college promise program through the establishment of a strong collaboration with Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) and California State University, Long Beach (CSULB). As a part of the program, students graduating from any of the LBUSD high schools receive their first semester of college free and a second semester paid for if they meet certain criteria (i.e., complete nine semester units, earn a 2.00 or above grade point average, and pass 67% of their first semester courses; Inside Higher Ed, 2015). At CSULB, students who have participated in the promise are given preferential admissions consideration and application review.

In addition to the three systems of education, a more recent addition to the college promise program included a partnership with the Long Beach Mayor's Office and the City of Long Beach. The Mayor of Long Beach has made a commitment to substantially increase the number of internships in Long Beach and to provide these internship opportunities to Long Beach College Promise program students (Long Beach College Promise, 2017). This addition to the college promise program has folded in an additional commitment of securing an educational pipeline leading to potential local economic development through internships in the region.

Dr. Jane Close Conoley, the President of California State University, Long Beach, has noted that the partnerships comprising the Long Beach College Promise program have been long-standing and work to change human behavior, which does not occur overnight (Mongeau, 2016). She has stated that the program not only provides access to college for local students, but it also helps to instill college-going behavior in local students at an early age. For example, Long Beach middle school students and their parents or guardians are asked to make a pledge for the promise by signing an agreement to go to school every day, complete homework, and seek help from teachers when needed. In return, the Long Beach College Promise program guarantees access to college regardless of household income (Mongeau, 2016).

Promise pathways. The Long Beach College Promise program provides assistance for local LBUSD students to make college affordable and accessible. In an effort to both make college affordable and increase the numbers of students who were placed in and successfully completed transfer-level English, math, and reading courses, the promise pathways (P2) program was launched at LBCC in 2012 as part of the larger umbrella of the Long Beach College Promise program. One of the early milestones of the P2 program was the utilization of multiple measures placement (i.e., use of high school transcript data in addition to standardized testing to assess

students' levels of performance in math, English, and reading) to place more students into college-level English, reading, and math courses (Long Beach City College, 2017). In order to implement multiple measures placement for students participating in the promise pathways program, LBCC established high school transcript data-sharing agreements with LBUSD. The establishment of this agreement moved the college away from using a single standardized test (i.e., Accuplacer) to using a combination of students' high school grades, overall GPA, and standardized test scores to predict promise students' placement and success in college-level English, math, and reading coursework (Long Beach City College, 2017).

Evaluation of the P2 cohort began upon implementation of the program. When comparing the success of the fall 2012 LBUSD promise pathways students to a peer comparison group, P2 students' achievement of educational milestones was significantly higher than their peer comparison group that did not participate in the program (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2013). For example, P2 students were placed into, attempted, and successfully completed college-level English at a higher rate than their peer comparison group. These 2012 P2 students had the advantage of being placed through the multiple measures assessment and had higher placement scores as a result of the incorporation of high school data into their placement results (while the peer comparison group was placed into English courses using the traditional placement method of standardized test cut scores). The differences in attempts and successful completion of transfer-level math and English courses between the two groups can be seen in Table 1 (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2013).

Table 1

First Term Achievement of Educational Milestones by Students in the LBCC Promise Pathways
Program Compared to Students from the Fall 2011 Cohort of First-Time LBUSD Students

Milestones	Fall 2012 Promise Pathways (n = 976)[a]		Fall 2011 Peer Group (n = 1660)	
	%	n	%	n
Attempted Transfer Math	16.0	156	5.2	86
Successfully Completed Transfer Math	8.2	80	2.8	46
Attempted Transfer English	52.9	516	5.5	92
Successfully Completed Transfer English	32.8	320	3.8	63

Note. Not all 976 students in the fall 2012 promise pathways cohort attempted math and English in the same term.

Access and entry into college and transfer-level courses has increased for all demographic groups participating in promise pathways. Furthermore, success rates for promise pathways demographic groups have increased, with Latino and African American students having the largest gains in success (Long Beach College Promise, 2013).

Critics of the promise. While innovations have taken place to increase access and shorten time to completion for students participating in the Long Beach College Promise program, the program, including promise pathways, has been criticized internally at LBCC. Specifically, faculty have voiced concern over the program being developed as a separate success program outside of the college's established planning process (Long Beach City College, 2014). To this end, LBCC's Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) institutional self-evaluation report noted how the results of an evaluation conducted on leadership and governance at the college revealed tension among college constituencies over the creation and implementation of new programs. In particular, the Long Beach College Promise program and promise pathways programs were perceived to have been created outside of the existing participatory governance processes without proper input from those who would be impacted by their implementation (Long Beach City College, 2014).

In addition, although promise pathways students have been found to pass English and math courses at higher rates than non-promise pathway students, they have not been found to complete college at higher rates (Horowitz, Eldahaby, Watson, & Basta, 2017). Furthermore, while success rates among disproportionately impacted demographic groups have increased, achievement gaps still persist (Long Beach College Promise, 2013). Partners at all levels of the Long Beach College Promise program have committed to closing these achievement gaps for student groups, yet these gaps have yet to be closed among participating college promise program student groups.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Completion by Design. Completion by Design was a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation-sponsored initiative. For the last five years of the initiative, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation worked with community colleges in Florida, Ohio, and North Carolina. The intent of this initiative was to identify pathways by which students would be more likely to succeed. According to Rassen et al. (2013), the three completion goals the initiative sought to achieve included an emphasis on completion of credentials (e.g., certificates and degrees), transferring to four-year universities, and raising the value of degrees and certificates in the labor market. The ultimate goal of Completion by Design was to increase the numbers of community college completions at scale while keeping community colleges and the cost of attendance affordable. In addition, there was value in ensuring community colleges remained open access and maintained high quality programs and credentials (Rassen et al., 2013). Furthermore, Completion by Design offered the colleges they worked with a number of technical assistance and supports related to research, implementation strategies and options, change management, and strategies for engaging campus constituents.

Loss/momentum framework. Completion by Design's loss/momentum framework provides a conceptual approach to the student experience that is broken into four phases (i.e., connection, entry, progress and completion). Within these four phases students engage with the institution in a number of ways. Each of these engagements or interactions with the institution can either boost a student's momentum towards a degree or certificate, or it can deter a student from continuing in their pursuit of higher education (Rassen et al., 2013).

The four phases of the student experience. The connection phase is where students first engage with the idea of going to college or attending a specific college (Rassen et al., 2013). During this phase, students may be exposed to careers or programs of study at an early juncture in their K-12 educational career that helps to solidify their intent to attend college.

The entry phase is when students first arrive at the college or begin their program of study. Through a student services lens, entry would incorporate areas such as admissions and records, assessment, orientation, financial aid, counseling, and completion of gatekeeper courses such as transfer-level English and math courses. Entry can also refer to the point in which a student decides to follow a particular program or concentration and ends when students complete the gatekeeper courses for that program.

The progress phase is where the student engages in a long-term commitment with the institution. Completion by Design defines this phase as completing program requirements, including those needed to achieve students' educational goals. During the progress phase, students can access institutional supports to help them move towards completion.

Finally, according to Rassen et al. (2013), the completion phase captures students' completion of their program of study and attainment of their goals. For many students, their

goals include opportunities in the workforce, while for others, their goals relate to transferring to a four-year university or continued education.

Long Beach College Promise Program Student Progress

While no data have currently been analyzed comparing persistence rates between college promise program and non-college promise program students, LBCC has experienced significant decreases in overall student persistence in recent years. This has led to a focus on persistence research at the college to identify ways to support persistence. In 2017, LBCC conducted a study of 4,600 students who did not persist at the college from the fall to spring terms. Results indicated that most students (i.e., 42%) did not return due to personal or financial reasons. In addition, approximately 30% did not enroll because LBCC courses offerings did not meet their needs (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2017).

Presently, the Long Beach College Promise program focuses primarily on connection and entry to the institution through first-year supports with the use of multiple measures to place students into higher-level basic skills courses and through awarding place-based scholarships. While early adopters of college promise programs have found evidence that their college promise programs have led to increased success, persistence and completion, LBCC has found that college promise program students complete at the same rate as non-college promise program students (Bartik et al., 2015; Callahan, 2010; Pierce, 2015). To this end, research at LBCC primarily focused on student connection, entry, and to some degree, completion, but has yet to examine loss and momentum points during the progress phase of the college promise program student experience.

With local funding in addition to Chancellor's Office funding for the Long Beach College Promise program and with the addition of a partnership with the Long Beach Mayor's

Office to provide internship opportunities to college promise program students, Long Beach is uniquely poised to support college promise program students as they progress through their second year toward completion at Long Beach City College. However, in order to support these students as they progress, it is critical to examine their persistence in comparison to their non-college promise program peers.

Thus, the following research question was posed to guide the investigation:

RQ1: Does participation in the Long Beach College Promise program influence fall-to-fall student persistence rates?

Additionally, while success rates of promise students were examined in 2012 and 2013 for English, math, and reading at LBCC, no further research has been conducted on student success for LBCC college promise program students. Recently, however, LBCC found that successful credit accumulation is an issue at LBCC in general for students, with only 46% of transfer-seeking students successfully completing 45 units (i.e., three-fourths of the required units for a degree) within two years (Corral, De La Torre, Holmgren, & Sims, 2018). With supports currently in place only for entering Long Beach College Promise program students, it is important to determine how promise students perform overall to identify if gaps exist in supports to assist them in progressing to completion. Therefore, the following research questions were asked:

RQ2: Does participation in the Long Beach College Promise program influence grade point averages and units completed for second-year students?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in completions (i.e., certificates, degrees, transfers) between Long Beach College Promise program student participants and non-college promise program students?

Chapter 3 – Methodology

College promise programs have been growing in number across the country, especially in California with the implementation of AB 19 allowing California community colleges to waive the first year of tuition for first-time, full-time students through the California College Promise (California Legislative Information, 2017). With this continued growth, there is a need to understand whether a relationship exists between participation in college promise programs and student persistence and completion. With over 75 college promise programs currently in existence in California (Regional Educational Laboratory West, 2019), this study is timely to inform existing college promise program practices and the development of future college promise programs by viewing these programs through a completion lens.

The purpose of this study was to identify whether a significant relationship existed between participation in the college promise program and student persistence, success, and completions at Long Beach City College (LBCC) through a Completion by Design framework. This study examined whether LBCC college promise program students persist and complete at different rates than non-college promise program students, while exploring factors that may influence second-year college promise program student persistence at LBCC.

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: Does participation in the college promise program influence fall-to-fall student persistence rates?

Research question one helped to identify whether differences in persistence rates existed between college promise program students and non-college promise program students. With the rapidly growing number of college promise programs in California and throughout the country, analyses of these programs should be focused on persistence.

RQ2: Does participation in the college promise program influence grade point averages and units completed for second-year students?

Research question two was posed to identify if a significant difference existed between second-year college promise program and non-college promise program students on the dependent variables of GPA and units completed. This information could help explain if there are differences in achievement between college promise program and non-college promise program students.

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in completions (i.e., certificates, degrees, transfers) between college promise program participants and non-college promise program students?

Very little information exists on completions for students in college promise programs. Many college promise programs are fairly new and have been established within the last three years. Few colleges have longitudinal data to track completions of college promise program participants. This question was asked to help inform and expand the literature on college promise programs and completions.

This chapter is organized into 10 parts that include an introduction, rationale for the methodology, research design, population and sample, sampling procedures, instrumentation and data collection, data analysis, assumptions, limitations, and a summary.

Rational for Methodology

This quantitative nonexperimental study relied on the collection of quantitative data. A major advantage of using a quantitative approach is that it allows the researcher to remain objective through the use of numbers (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Through the use of data and by identifying specific variables to analyze, this study explored whether there was a statistically significant difference in persistence and completion rates among college promise

program participants and a comparison group of non-college promise program participants. The independent variable in this study is student participation in the LBCC College Promise program. The dependent variables in this study are fall-to-fall persistence rates, GPA, units completed, and completion of a certificate, degree, or transfer to a four-year institution. Through the use of statistical data analysis this study identified whether statistical relationships existed between these variables (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

Research Design

For this quantitative study, a correlational research design was utilized. According to Johnson and Christensen (2014), correlational research studies the relationship between one or more dependent and independent variables. This study explored the difference between college promise program and non-college promise program students to determine whether a significant relationship existed between participation in the college promise program and persistence, success, and completion.

Since the purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of the relationship that college promise programs may have on student persistence, success, and completion, a correlational research design helped to identify if there was a statistically significant difference between students who participated in LBCC's College Promise program and students who do not on these key variables. The LBCC Office of Institutional Effectiveness provided the quantitative persistence, success, and completion data, which included internally-collected student-level achievement data and National Student Clearinghouse data (i.e., to show four-year institutions that college promise participants have transferred to).

To assess if there were significant differences between college promise program students and non-college promise program students in regard to fall-to-fall persistence and completions,

Pearson's chi-square tests were used. The Pearson's chi-square tests determined whether there was a significant relationship between the independent variable (i.e., student participation in the college promise program) and each of the dependent variables (i.e., student persistence and completion; Johnson & Christensen, 2014). In addition, to determine whether there was a significant difference in the means for average GPAs and units completed between students who participated in the college promise program and those who did not, independent t-tests were conducted.

Completion by Design's loss/momentum framework provides a conceptual approach to the student experience and was used to guide this study. The framework includes four distinct phases (i.e., connection, entry, progress, completion) to help colleges identify where students meet their greatest obstacles to persistence, success, and completion. Within each of these four phases students engage with the institution, and each engagement can either boost a student's momentum toward program persistence and completion or deter a student from continuing with courses and college altogether (Rassen et al., 2013).

Population and Sample

A population is the larger group or body to which the researcher would like to generalize the sample results (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). While a population refers to the larger generalizable group, a sample is a subset of the population and is considerably smaller in size. Characteristics taken from the larger population and represented in the sample help to explain the characteristics of the larger group. When a researcher analyzes the characteristics of the smaller sample, the researcher may generalize or make statements about the population based on the analysis of the sample (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

The population for this study was all first-time college students enrolled full-time at LBCC. The sample for this study included fall 2013, 2014, and 2015 LBCC college promise program students who received financial assistance in their first year through the college promise program scholarship. These students were direct matriculants from high school who started college during the fall semester immediately after graduating. A corresponding non-college promise program student comparison group was identified using propensity score matching for each cohort year. This comparison group was match-based on first-time students with full-time enrollment, as well as students' demographic characteristics (i.e., age, ethnicity, gender).

Sampling Procedures

The sample type selected for this study was convenience sampling. This form of sampling includes participants who are available or can be easily recruited into the sample (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). For this study, the sample included cohort data of college promise program participants and a non-college promise program student comparison group that entered the college as first-time, full-time students in fall 2013, 2014, and 2015. To match the students in the treatment group (i.e., college promise program students) to the control group (i.e., non-college promise program students), propensity score matching was used. Propensity score matching attempts to create a one-for-one matching using specific characteristics (Austin, 2011). In this study, the characteristics used to match the comparison group to the treatment group included first-time students who enrolled in 12 or more units at LBCC for the fall 2013, 2014, and 2015 terms. In addition, to create the control group, the groups were matched based on student age, ethnicity, and gender.

This study originally received IRB approval from National American University on January 23, 2019. An external research request was submitted to the LBCC Office of

Institutional Effectiveness on January 27, 2019. This request was submitted via email correspondence and is included in the Appendix. The email included a request for access to a dataset containing 2013, 2014, and 2015 college promise program cohort data. The data points requested for the cohorts included students' overall grade point averages (i.e., total GPA up to the end of their second year), total units completed (i.e., total units completed up to the end of their second year), student fall-to-fall persistence (i.e., whether or not students remained continuously enrolled from fall of year one to fall of year two), and completions (i.e., completion of a certificate, degree, or transfer). Furthermore, a dataset with the same variables previously noted, was requested for a control group of non-college promise program students for each cohort year. For both datasets, student demographic variables including gender, ethnicity, and age, were also requested. The data files provided by the LBCC Office of Institutional Effectiveness to the researcher were password protected by the researcher upon receival and stored in a secure location on the researcher's computer. This sample was appropriate and representative of the population. The entire cohorts for the years 2013, 2014, and 2015 were included in the analysis for this study, and a control group of non-college promise program students for these cohort years was matched with the treatment group using propensity score matching.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

According to Johnson and Christensen (2014), instrumentation is "any change that occurs in the way the dependent variable is measured" (p. 286). In order to measure the variables of this study, an external research request was submitted for student-level data. A point person within the Office of Institutional Effectiveness was identified. Data collection occurred by obtaining student-level disaggregated data from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness on February 7,

2019. Between the months of March and May, a correlational analysis was conducted to identify whether a significant difference existed between college promise program and non-college promise program students' persistence, success, and completion at LBCC.

Data Analysis

To examine research questions one and three, Pearson's chi-square tests were run to analyze the relationship between the independent variable (i.e., student participation in the college promise program) and each of the two dependent variables (i.e., persistence, completion) to determine whether any significant differences existed between second-year college promise program students and non-college promise program students at Long Beach City College (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Two independent t-tests were conducted to address research question two and to compare the difference in means in relation to each of the two dependent variables of grade point average and total units completed at the end of the second year for students participating in the college promise program and their matched comparison group.

The statistical software package SAS version 9.4 was used to provide descriptive statistics, as well as to conduct the Pearson's chi-squared and the independent t-test analyses. The results of the descriptive statistics assisted the researcher in developing the matched comparison group, as well as in summarizing and displaying the demographics and background of the students (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Pearson's chi-square tests were used to determine whether the independent variable was a statistically significant predictor of each of the respective dependent variables for questions one and three (i.e., persistence and completion). Two independent t-tests were used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in the means of the dependent variables (i.e., GPA and units completed) between the two student groups (i.e., independent variable).

Assumptions

A key assumption of this study is that the Office of Institutional Effectiveness provided the researcher with student-level data that are reliable, accurate, and representative of students both those in the college promise program and those not in the program at Long Beach City College.

Limitations

Limitations are often areas over which the researcher has no control. They are elements of the study that may negatively affect the ability to generalize the results to larger population (Roberts, 2010). One limitation in this study included the generalizability of the findings in the study. For this study, the researcher analyzed data for only one college's college promise program. It is possible that the experiences of second-year college promise program students at other colleges are different from the students who participated in this study. Additionally, there are more variables that may impact fall-to-fall persistence, GPA, units completed, and completion of a certificate, degree, or transfer than are examined in this study.

Summary

The results obtained from this study will be reported in chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes a discussion and analysis of the findings, implications, and suggestions for future research based on the findings.

Chapter 4 – Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify whether a significant relationship existed between participation in the college promise program and student persistence, success, and completions at Long Beach City College (LBCC) through a Completion by Design framework. To this end, the primary objective of this study was to collect and analyze longitudinal data from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness on incoming college promise program student cohorts enrolling as new, matriculating, full-time students at LBCC for the years 2013, 2014, and 2015 with a control group. Using SAS software, this quantitative nonexperimental study examined whether differences existed between college promise program students and non-college promise program students through the use of Pearson's chi-square and independent t-tests.

Chapter 4 includes the results of the statistical analyses conducted using student-level data provided by LBCC. The chapter is organized into three sections with each section highlighting one of the three research questions asked in this study. Each research question is followed by a description of the statistical test conducted, the results of the statistical test, and an analysis of the findings.

Research Question (RQ) 1: Fall-to-Fall Persistence Rates

RQ1: Does participation in the college promise influence fall-to-fall student persistence rates? Research question one was posed to identify whether or not a difference existed in persistence (i.e., first fall term of enrollment at LBCC to second fall term enrollment at LBCC) between college promise students and non-college promise program students. To examine research question one, a Pearson's chi-square analysis test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant relationship between the independent variable (i.e., student participation in the college promise) and the dependent variable (i.e., fall-to-fall persistence). Pearson's chi-

square test is used to discover if a significant relationship exists between two categorical variables (Field, 2009). To identify the effect size of the relationship, Cramer's V was utilized for this study. Effect size determines the magnitude of an observed effect (Field, 2009).

The results of the Pearson's chi-square test indicated that there was a significant association between participation in the college promise program and whether or not students persisted at higher rates from their first fall term to their second fall term at LBCC X^2 (1, N = 2072) = 8.02, p > .01, V = .06. Students who participated in the college promise program were more likely to persist to the second fall term than students who did not participate in the program. The frequencies of student persistence for the two groups can be found in Table 2.

Table *2*

Frequencies of Fall-to-Fall Student Persistence for College Promise Program and Non-College Promise Program Students

Student Group	*n*	Persisted from First to Second Fall Term	Did Not Persist from First to Second Fall Term
		%	*%*
College Promise	1036	72.97	27.03
Non-College Promise	1036	67.28	32.72

Research Question (RQ) 2: Second Year Grade Point Averages and Units Completed

RQ2: Does participation in the college promise influence grade point averages and units completed for second-year students? Research question two examined whether student participation in the college promise program was significantly related to students' GPA and total units completed by the end of their second year. To answer research question two, two independent t-tests were conducted. An independent t-test is used to compare the overall means between two different groups on one continuous variable to determine whether a significant

difference exists between the two groups (Field, 2009). To calculate the effect size, Pearson's correlation coefficient was utilized.

Grade point average. The results of the independent t-test indicated that non-college promise program students on average had higher GPAs at the end of their second year ($M = 1.97$, $S = 1.12$) than college promise program students ($M = 1.77$, $S = 1.04$). This difference was significant $t(2031) = 4.25$, $p < .001$. This finding also represents a large effect size $r = .94$.

Units completed. The findings of the independent t-test indicated that non-college promise program students on average had successfully completed a greater number of units by the end of their second year ($M = 27.30$, $S = 21.49$) than college promise program students ($M = 24.37$, $S = 19.78$). This difference in units completed between the two groups of students was significant $t(2070) = 3.23$, $p < .001$. In addition, this result also represents a large effect size $r = .71$.

Research Question (RQ) 3: Difference in Completion Rates

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in completions (i.e., certificates, degrees, transfers) between college promise program participants and non-college promise students? College promise programs are fairly new, and little longitudinal data is available to validate whether a significant relationship exists between participation in the college promise program and college completions in the form of an earned certificate, degree, and/or transfer to a four-year college or university. Therefore, research question three asked whether a difference existed in college completions (i.e., certificates, degrees, transfers) between college promise program students and non-college promise program students by the end of their third year at LBCC. To answer this research question, Pearson's chi-square test was utilized to determine whether the relationship

between these two variables was significant. Additionally, Cramer's V was used to determine the effect size of the relationship.

The results of the Pearson's chi-square test indicated that the relationship between the two variables was significant. Specifically, there was a significant relationship between participation in the college promise program and whether or not students completed X^2 (1, $N = 2072$) = 25.81, p < .001, V = .11. These results show that non-college promise program students are more likely to complete a certificate, degree, or transfer to a four-year institution within a three-year time frame than college promise program students. The frequencies of student completions for the two groups can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Frequencies of Student Completions for College Promise Program and Non-College Promise Program Students

Student Group	*n*	Completed within 3 Years *%*	Did Not Complete within 3 Years *%*
College Promise	1036	11.58	88.42
Non-College Promise	1036	19.69	80.31

Summary

This study examined whether a significant relationship existed between students' participation in the college promise program and student persistence, success, and completion. Based on the results of the statistical analyses conducted for research questions one, two, and three, the findings indicated that significant differences did exist between these two groups for all of the dependent variables measured. College promise program students were only found to be more likely to persist to their second fall term than non-college promise program students. Non-college promise program students were not only found to have on average higher GPAs and

total units completed by the end of their second year than college promise program students, but results also indicated that non-college promise program students were more likely to complete a certificate, degree, or transfer to a four-year institution within a three-year time frame.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

The college promise has historically been an access-based program that enables students to pursue higher education through financial assistance and supports. As momentum builds in support of access-based college promise programs throughout the country, community colleges will need to structure supports in addition to financial assistance to ensure students progress through college and complete awards. As more data become available on college promise programs, community colleges can leverage these data to implement frameworks and structured pathways for college promise programs that are focused on both student access and success.

Summary of the Study

Overview of the problem. The mission of the community college system has experienced a dramatic shift from a focus on access alone to both access and successful completion in recent years, as concerns have been raised about the nation's ability to meet future demand for a skilled workforce with postsecondary education and remain a global competitor in higher education (Lumina Foundation, 2018b). Studies have recently shown that persistence and completion rates are extremely low, especially for community college students (Ginder et al., 2017; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). In direct response to this identified need, President Obama and philanthropic organizations (e.g., the Lumina Foundation) set ambitious goals to increase college completions for all students (Lumina Foundation, 2017b; Obama, 2009). These calls to action from national leaders spurred a commitment and nationwide priority to increase community college persistence and completions, while at the same time addressing the issue of college affordability to help remove financial barriers for students on their paths to completion of their educational goals (Lumina Foundation, 2017a). As a result, many community

colleges have responded in part by creating college promise programs (see Chapter 1 for college promise program definition).

According to Regional Educational Laboratory West at WestEd (2019), there are currently 75 active college promise programs in California alone. All of these college promise programs provide direct financial supports for students to remove financial barriers to enrollment in college, with the ultimate goals of increasing the number of students enrolling in higher education and promoting increases in student persistence and completion of postsecondary awards (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). As more community colleges adopt college promise program models, they also continue to focus primarily on access and college affordability by providing financial assistance to students. Since the majority of these college promise programs are new, little research has been conducted to determine whether this focus on access and affordability leads to improved student outcomes as these promise programs intended (i.e., persistence, success, and completion).

Long Beach City College was one of the first three community colleges to implement a college promise program in 2008 (Inside Higher Ed, 2015). The LBCC College Promise program has historically focused on connection and entry to the college by providing place-based scholarships to students for their first year and the utilization of alternative assessment (i.e., multiple measures) for college promise program student placement into English, math, and reading courses. In addition, LBCC maintains a strong relationship with LBUSD and CSULB, two partners in the Long Beach College Promise. The college promise program is intended to encourage student completion and transfer, with college promise program students given preferential admissions consideration and application review at CSULB. Yet, research has not been conducted on the LBCC College Promise program to determine whether students who

participate in this program progress and complete at higher rates than non-college promise program students.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify whether a significant relationship existed between participation in the college promise program and student persistence, success, and completions at Long Beach City College (LBCC) through a Completion by Design framework. This study posed three research questions:

RQ1: Does participation in the college promise program influence fall-to-fall student persistence rates?

RQ2: Does participation in the college promise program influence grade point averages and units completed for second-year students?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in completions (i.e., certificates, degrees, transfers) between college promise program students and non-college promise program students?

Review of methodology. This study was a quantitative correlational study using three cohort years of college promise program students and a comparison group of non-college promise program students identified through propensity score matching. The dependent variables of this study were fall-to-fall persistence rates, GPA (i.e., overall GPA up to the end of their second year), units completed (i.e., total units completed up to the end of their second year), and completion (i.e., completion of a certificate, degree, or transfer to a four-year institution within a three-year time period). To answer research questions one and three, Pearson's chi square tests were conducted. To answer research question two, two independent t-tests were utilized. The analyses in this study were conducted to identify whether statistically significant relationships exist between student participation in the college promise program and the dependent variables.

The LBCC Office of Institutional Effectiveness provided the quantitative data utilized in this study including student persistence, success, and completion data using internally collected student-level achievement data and the National Student Clearinghouse data.

Major findings. *Persistence.* Students who participated in the college promise program were more likely to persist to the second fall term than students who did not participate in the college promise program.

Grade point average and units completed. The results of the independent t-test indicated that non-college promise program students, on average, had higher GPAs at the end of their second year than college promise program students. The findings of the second independent t-test indicated that non-college promise program students, on average, had successfully completed a greater number of units by the end of their second year than college promise program students.

Completions. There was a significant relationship between participation in the college promise program and whether or not students completed. These results showed that non-college promise program students were more likely to complete a certificate, degree, or transfer to a four-year institution within a three-year time frame than college promise program students.

Findings Related to the Literature

Long Beach City College has been recognized for its Long Beach College Promise program and specifically for the connection and entry supports it provides to students as a part of this program, as well as the program's partnership with CSULB that allows preferential admissions for college promise program students. However, while LBCC has found that college promise program students complete transfer-level math and English at higher rates compared to non-college promise program students due to the use of multiple measures placement, the current

study found that for progress and completion metrics, the only metric in which college promise program students were found to out-perform non-college promise program students was persistence (i.e., college promise program students only persisted at higher rates than non-college promise program students). For Long Beach City College's promise program, students were found to, on average, have both lower GPAs and fewer units completed by the end of their second year, and were less likely to complete by the end of their third year than their non-college promise program student counterparts.

These findings are in alignment with current research that suggests that college promise programs cannot rely solely on providing students with financial assistance to increase their success. They must additionally include intentional and structured support services after students enroll to help them be successful, persist, and complete their educational goals (Rauner, Lundquist, & Smith, 2019). Providing supports, such as counseling services, academic supports in the form of tutoring or supplemental instruction, and the use of technology to support faculty-to-student communication, are needed to increase student progress and completion.

These findings are also in alignment with Completion by Design's loss/momentum framework that emphasizes not only the importance of momentum points, such as financial assistance and early completion of transfer-level English and math during the connection and entry points of a student's experience with an institution, but also stresses the importance of providing supports for students as they progress and complete (e.g., targeted student services, emergency aid to deal with life events, intensive and flexible advising; Rassen et al., 2013). Without an intentional focus on progress and completion momentum points, supports, and clear pathways, LBCC college promise program students are completing at lower rates than their peers.

Implications

Community colleges implementing college promise programs must analyze and monitor progress and completion trends within their college promise programs. As the research findings of this study indicate, additional supports are needed to ensure college promise program students continue to progress through key milestones of their educational journeys and complete their educational goals of earning a certificate, degree, or transferring to a four-year institution. Moreover, community colleges with existing college promise programs should examine college promise program student persistence, success, and completions to determine if similar findings to this study exist and if so, consider implementing additional supports to help students complete.

In California, the recent passing of Assembly Bill 2, allows community colleges to pay for up to two years of tuition and other educational expenses such as textbooks, transportation and child care through the California College Promise (California Legislative Information, 2019). With the implementation of this assembly bill, the college promise program is available for any California residents enrolling into college for the first time and taking at least 12 or more units each primary term (i.e., fall, spring). The findings of this study show the need for California community colleges to recognize these assembly bill financial supports will not directly translate into student progress and completion at their institutions. With the implementation of this assembly bill in the context of this research, community colleges should ensure that they are intentional in providing supports that focus on retention and completion to complement the financial support this assembly bill provides.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Assembly bill 705. A focus on providing intentional supports for student progress and completion of awards is especially critical with California passing assembly bill 705, which

requires all California community colleges to adopt a multiple measures model for math and English placement similar to the one previously implemented at LBCC (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2019a). With the passing of this assembly bill, community colleges must increase the probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level math and English courses within one year. In addition, the bill requires colleges to place students into math and English courses using multiple measures (i.e., high school transcript data including last high school math or English courses taken, high school grades, and high school GPA) without the use of a standardized placement test. As evidenced in this study, while previous research on the LBCC College Promise program found that students complete transfer-level English and math at higher rates than non-college promise program students, these momentum points do not translate into more units completed or higher GPAs for these students by the end of their second year or higher rates of completion and transfer for these students within three years. As colleges implement supports and changes to be in compliance with this bill, they will also need to recognize that passing transfer-level English and math early on in students' college careers may not lead them to progress and complete in a timely manner without additional interventions and supports.

Guided pathways. One way that community colleges may help their college promise program students' progress and completion is through the implementation of the guided pathways framework. The guided pathways framework emphasizes the need for community colleges to move away from a cafeteria model of self-service selection of courses available to students and instead encourages the development of a clear set of sequenced courses with embedded supports that can help students enter college with a clear direction and goal – earn a postsecondary award and/or transfer to a four-year college or university. An increasing number

of community colleges, as well as four-year universities across the country, are adopting guided pathways to support completion of awards and advancement within the labor force (Bailey et al., 2015). The guided pathways framework focuses on the holistic restructuring of an institution to improve student progress and completion. This framework moves community colleges away from a model solely focused on student access to higher education. Colleges implementing guided pathways may see benefits for their college promise program students as they shift to providing additional supports throughout students' journeys to help them accomplish their educational goals.

First-year experience. As found in this study, offering financial assistance and multiple measures placement alone is not enough to ensure students connect with the college, move through the college, and complete their educational and career goals. Throughout the nation and the state of California, a growing number of community colleges have implemented first-year experience (FYE) models that focus on providing intentional supports within a student's first year at the college. These FYE programs provide community college students with many tools and supports needed to succeed, progress, and complete. These programs are intended to instill student awareness of the value of grit, persistence, critical thinking, and student success through intentional supports, such as tutoring support, dedicated counselor support, a comprehensive student educational plan with a clear sequencing of courses to goal completion, specialized workshops, a network of peers, and staff and faculty who serve as success teams for students (WestEd, 2019). Community colleges initiating or currently implementing college promise programs may consider implementing an FYE program as a way to support college promise program student progress and completion.

Student-centered funding formula. Related to student success and completions, California implemented a new performance-based funding formula that provides base funding to all California community colleges (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2019b). With a stronger tie between student performance and institutional funding, it is imperative that California community colleges adopt practices that focus on access and success to ensure longevity of funding, as well as student success. Now that California community colleges are funded in part by how well students perform, efforts like college promise programs should be in alignment with supporting institutional priorities, as well as the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office's priorities to ensure fiscal stability.

Recommendations for Further Research

Many California community colleges with college promise programs, including Long Beach City College, are currently implementing communication platforms focused on case management models and early alerts to improve student success (Rauner et al., 2019). Future research should examine how the use of these communication tools are associated with college promise program students' progress and completion.

This study focused on examining college promise program student persistence, success, and completion at one California community college. Thus, these findings may not be generalizable to other community colleges across the nation. Community college researchers should analyze their college promise program student persistence, success, and completion data to determine whether findings are similar.

Student development theory posits that if students are fully integrated into the college they are attending (i.e., students feel safe and included in the college environment, students participate in the college and take ownership roles and build community at the college) they are

more likely to complete (Strange & Banning, 2001). This study found that college promise program financial assistance and the use of multiple measures alone do not lead to increases in student success and completions for students participating in the program, indicating that financial need alone may not be enough for students to complete their educational goals. Future research may explore college promise programs through the lens of student development theory and identify potential loss points for college promise program students that may exist outside of financial barriers.

Concluding Remarks

Based on the recent growth of college promise programs in California and across the nation, it is anticipated that more community colleges will continue to adopt these programs. As college promise programs are implemented and refined, community colleges must utilize longitudinal data, as well as leading and lagging indicators to inform their college promise programs. With efforts around guided pathways also gaining momentum, it will be important to interweave existing success efforts in community colleges with the guided pathways framework to ensure college promise program students connect and enter college with clear educational and career goals. The findings of this study indicate that addressing financial need is not enough to improve student success. Thus, implementing intentional supports throughout the educational journey of a student will be critical in supporting students' progress towards their goals of completing a certificate, degree, or transfer to a four-year university.

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Appendix – Email Communication – External Research Request

January 15, 2019

Dear Dr. VanVolkinburg:

I would like to first thank you for coming to our Community College Leadership Program doctoral class to speak about Long Beach City College's (LBCC) research request process and to offer support as we narrow down our dissertation topics and solidify our proposals. At this stage in the process, I would like to formally submit an external research request to Long Beach City College's Office of Institutional Effectiveness to gather research on my topic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify whether a significant relationship existed between participation in the college promise program and student persistence, success, and completions at Long Beach City College (LBCC) through a Completion by Design framework. This study will examine whether LBCC college promise program students persist and complete at different rates than non-college promise program students.

Research Questions

RQ1: Does participation in the college promise program influence fall-to-fall student persistence rates?

RQ2: Does participation in the college promise program influence grade point averages and units completed for second-year students?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in completions (i.e., certificates, degrees, transfers) between college promise program participants and non-college promise program students?

Data Requested

After speaking with Andrew Fuenmayor about available data of our Long Beach College Promise program students in one of our college promise meetings, he suggested data sets for college promise students from the 2013, 2014, and 2015 cohorts, as well as comparison groups of non-college promise students. I am requesting the following data sets:

Data Set 1: Student ID, Term, Promise Pathways Flag, Promise Scholarship, Courses (e.g., ENGL 1), Course Section, Number of Course Units, Course Units Successfully Completed, Grades, English and Math Placements

Data Set 2: Student ID, Term, Promise Pathways Flag, Promise Scholarship, Age, Ethnicity, Gender, Promise Scholarship

Data Set 3: Student ID, Term, Promise Pathways Flag, Promise Scholarship, Award (certificate and/or degree)

Data Set 4: Student ID, Term, Promise Pathways Flag, Promise Scholarship, Transferred, Transfer Institution

Data files will be stored in a secure location on the researcher's computer. If you have any questions or would like for me to schedule a meeting with yourself or Andrew, please let me know. I look forward to your response.

Best,
Nohel C. Corral