

## ABSTRACT

### AN INVESTIGATION OF FACTORS IMPACTING HMONG STUDENTS' COMPLETION OF A FOUR-YEAR POSTSECONDARY DEGREE

Complex human, social, cultural, and institutional factors appear to challenge Hmong students' pursuit of a four-year postsecondary degree. This qualitative study examined the human capital, social capital, cultural capital, and institutional factors that affect Hmong students' abilities to pursue higher education in the California Central Valley. The study employed in-depth interviews with a purposeful sample of 26 participants, ranging from students, parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators. The research study developed grounded theory on institutional capital, which is having the knowledge of the educational system and being able to effectively use human capital, social capital, and cultural capital to maximize the benefits of higher education.

For the Hmong student participants in this study, the major challenges were related to language, social, cultural, and institutional barriers. Hmong students' access to support systems in educational institutions were limited due to a lack of knowledge of what was available and/or lack of adequate support programs and resources. Institutional factors such as disempowerment of Hmong students and parents and lack of knowledge of the educational system hindered Hmong students' completion of a postsecondary degree.

Based on the developing theory of institutional capital, implications of the study's findings focus upon enhancing the availability of institutional support systems for Hmong students and parents to access higher education. Hmong students would benefit from higher levels of mentoring, counseling staff, and services, specifically those who come from Hmong backgrounds to provide

comfort and role models, and coordination of support services between high schools and colleges to facilitate easier transitions. Educational institutions should also focus on involving more Hmong parents in their children's education.

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