

# Phase 1 — Study Definition Prior to Data Acquisition

## Project Title

Institutional Characteristics and Student Success Outcomes in California Community Colleges (2019–2023)

## Primary Research Question

Which institutional-level characteristics are associated with variation in first-year retention and completion rates across California community colleges?

## Dependent Variable (Outcome)

The focal outcome variable will be Fall-to-Fall persistence rate. Alternative outcomes considered include three-year completion rate and transfer rate; however, Fall-to-Fall persistence provides a direct and widely used institutional effectiveness metric relevant to California community college reporting frameworks.

## Predictors (Institution-Level)

Institutional predictors will be drawn from publicly available California Community Colleges Data Mart extracts and may include: Percentage of Pell recipients; Total enrollment size; Percentage of part-time students; Student-faculty ratio; Full-time equivalent faculty; Expenditures per FTE (if available); Percentage of first-generation students (if available).

Model specification will remain parsimonious, limiting predictors to approximately four to six variables to preserve interpretability, reduce multicollinearity risk, and maintain analytical clarity.